

RAMAYANA

(A PLAY)



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ACT ONE

SCENE. 1.

(An apartment in Kaikayee's palace. At the centre back is a golden cot with a thick mattress covered with costly sheets on which is lying Kaikayee in slumber. From a side enters Manthara, a hunch-backed, aged and ungainly but a favourite maid of Kaikayee.)

MANTHARA (*Facing the audience, aside*): The whole town is in a festive mood. Its streets have been cleaned, watered and festooned, houses have been decorated, flags have been hoisted on pinnacles, towers and tall trees, gay groups smartly dressed are moving along the streets on foot, on horses, elephants and in chariots; and in the squares and recesses merry musical parties are entertaining passers-by. I understand that Rama is to be installed as Yuvaraj on the morrow and arrangements therefor have gone apace. I was ignorant of it all, till now. I must hurry forth and apprise my mistress Kaikayee of the doom that is awaiting her. (*Then stepping a little forward sees Kaikayee sleeping sound on the cot and going near her and waking her up says loudly*) Kaikayee, I wonder you could sleep so peacefully while your world is toppling down by your ears. Wake up, mistress, and listen to the awful news that I have had to bring to you.

KAIKAYEE (*Wakes and sits up, rubbing her eyes and seeing Manthara*): Manthara, you look anxious and perturbed. What troubles you, pray?

MANTHARA (*A little petulant*): You may well ask me what is troubling me when a calamity is hanging over your head!

KAIKAYEE: Manthara, tell me in plain language what it is all about.

MANTHARA: Has it not reached your ears that Kausalya's son Rama is to be installed tomorrow as Ayodhya's Yuvaraj?

KAIKAYEE (*With a happy smile*): Manthara, how you scared me while wanting to convey the happy news to me. I am so glad that they have decided to instal Rama as the Crown Prince, the fittest person to occupy the place and well qualified to relieve the aged monarch of many of his stately burdens. Manthara, take this golden necklet as a reward for being the first to bring me these glad tidings. (*Removes her golden necklet and hands it to Manthara*) Ask me what else you want

MANTHARA (*Throwing away the necklet angrily*): Glad tidings indeed! Foolish woman, you think this is a matter to rejoice about? Have you ever pondered over its consequences to you and your own son, Bharata, if you allow such an event to come about?

KAIKAYEE: What else can happen to us but good and happiness? Rama is the eldest of the sons and is the rightful heir to the throne. He is so noble, so good, so righteous and so well-behaved that I and

Bharata can expect nothing but good from him. Why, he is as affectionate, as obedient and as respectful to me as to his own mother and I, in turn, love him as much as I do Bharata : and the four brothers are so attached to one another and so act towards one another that they look like parts of one whole. Could there be anything more pleasing to me than that Rama should be made Yuvaraj ?

MANTHARA : Oh ! have I fostered such a stupid girl ? Kaikayee, cannot your brain work better than this ? Think you these things will continue when situations change ? Bharata is always a potential claimant to the throne and does it not strike you, that Rama, fully conscious of it, would when he comes into power want to get rid of him and that there might even be danger to Bharata's life ? And what about yourself ? Your rival Kausalya, Rama's mother, now ignored and chafing under it, by your supplanting her in Dasaratha's affections, would surely rise in influence when Rama is elevated to position. You think she will not wreak her vengeance against you when she gets the power ? Even to be allowed to live in the palace, you shall have to be her hand-maid and Bharata Rama's servant. Think well over this. And what about this surreptitious conduct of your own husband ? Do you still imagine that he is sincere in his love for you and trusts you ? Why then has he not informed you of his intentions yet though all the world knows them and why should he have chosen this moment for Rama's installation when your own son Bharata is away ? Nay, he only

pretends to love you while favouring your rival. Kaikayee, if you want to make your position secure you must prevent the function from happening tomorrow and get your son Bharata installed as the Crown Prince.

(This speech of Manthara has set Kaikayee thinking and after some rumination)

KAIKAYEE: Manthara, my faithful maid, I find there is much force in what you say, but how can I at this late stage prevent Rama's installation and secure it for Bharata?

MANTHARA: It is simple. it is quite easy. You could not have forgotten that in the long past, when you saved Dasaratha's life in a war which he had gone to fight on the side of the Devas he granted you two boons. You have not utilised them so far and they come in very handy now. That old husband of yours always dotes on you and could never resist to grant whatever you ask of him. He is sure to come to you now to inform you of the function proposed for tomorrow. Before he comes, fling away all the ornaments that you are wearing, loosen and ruffle your hair, pretend to be in great distress and anger and lie down on the ground covering your face with your hands and weeping and sobbing. Dasaratha, seeing you in this condition, will rush to you enquiring into the cause of it all and promising anything to console you. Having well got him into your coils ask him for the first boon the

enthronement of Bharata as the Crown Prince, and for the second the exile of Rama as a hermit to the forest. I need not have to teach you how to ensnare your husband.

KAIKAYEE: I thank you, Manthara, for opening my eyes and for your instructing me how to act in this matter. You go and I shall do everything as you have taught me. *(Manthara goes and Kaikayee removes her ornaments from her body one by one and throws them away in different directions. She loosens her hair, ruffles it and turning towards the wall lies down crying and sobbing pretending great grief and anger. Dasaratha, with a happy face, anxious to convey to her, prior to others, the joyful news of Rama's proposed installation on the morrow, comes hastily into the room; but seeing Kaikayee lying down on the ground with her hair dishevelled and her ornaments thrown pell mell stops dead, stunned for a moment, and then hastens to her and kneeling on the ground by her side turns her face towards him and stroking her body gently.)*

DASARATHA *(In an anxious tone)*: What ails you, my angel? What has angered you so much that you have thrown away your ornaments and are lying on the ground crying, turning your face away, with your hair dishevelled? Who has offended you or what is it you want of me? Whom do you wish that I should favour or punish whom? Please get up and speak your desire. There is nothing that I shall not do for you.

KAIKAYEE You men are so profuse in your promises and beguile us simple women with meaningless words When, however, it comes to making good those words, you cunningly and heartlessly back out.

DASARATHA: Kaikayee, have I ever failed in my promises to you? Why accuse me now of such conduct? Tell me what you want and be it so rare a thing to find or so difficult to procure, my whole realm shall be searched for it and it shall be found and brought to you at whatever cost it be.

KAIKAYEE: Words, words, words. They cost nothing and I have heard such words often enough, but can I be sure that you would abide by them?

DASARATHA: Why doubt it? I have never broken my words in the case of any and will I ever break them in yours?

KAIKAYEE: Your remember you granted me two boons long long years ago, when I did some service to you in the war you fought against Asuras in aid of Devas?

DASARATHA: Is it my fault that you have not asked anything for them as yet?

KAIKAYEE: I shall do so now but can I depend on your truly fulfilling my requests?

DASARATHA: Kaikayee, why question me about it again and again? Why this suspicion? I swear by

by Rama dearer to me than life itself that I shall grant you whatever you ask.

KAIKAYEE : Witness ye Gods this husband of mine has repeatedly asserted that he will grant me my wishes. If he repent and retract ye be the judges and deal with him suitably Now my dearest lord, I shall name my two wishes. For the first boon I ask that my son Bharata be installed Yuvaraj instead of Rama, and for the second that Rama be banished to the woods for fourteen years, to live there as a hermit. (*Dasaratha hearing this, falls down in a swoon and recovering after sometime.*)

DASARATHA : Kaikayee, what requests are these that you make? Oh, please say that you were only jesting with a view to test me and that you do not really mean them.

KAIKAYEE : Nay, I do mean them. I asked for them in all seriousness and I insist that these two requests of mine be carried out as promised me.

DASARATHA : Kaikayee, how can you seriously make such requests? Are you not aware that it is the unbroken tradition of our family that the throne should go to the eldest son? And when Rama the eldest son is living, how can Bharatha the younger aspire for it? And what offence has Rama committed to be banished to the woods? That is a punishment prescribed for a very heinous offence and can I impose it on any innocent person let alone Rama?

And what has Rama done to you to incur your hatred ? He always looks upon you as he does on his own mother and loves you with equal fervour. You also were as affectionate towards him as towards Bharata and made no difference between the two. Why *now* this cruel change ? My goddess, my sweet wife, relent, withdraw these requests and ask for o hers instead.

KAIKAYEE : I want *th m* or nothing Grant them and maintain your reputation as a man of his words or refuse and be known as a perjurer who makes solemn promises only to break them. And know if you do not grant these requests of mine, I shall take it as an insult and die.

DASARATHA : (*with fiery anger*) Thou fierce tigress wicked witch, vile woman, I had taken you to my bosom as my dearest wife & never knew that I was harbouring there a most venomous viper. Oh ! how cunningly this woman has drawn the net around me. What a tight fix she has got me into ? How can I keep my words or break them ? I begot Rama in my extreme old age with the performance of big and costly sacrifices. He is so good, so gentle, so noble, so wise, so learned and so perfect every way that he has endeared himself to every one, has grown to be the pet of all the world and the apple of my eye. For what reason and under what pretext can I banish such a person ; and how can I bear his separation from me for fourteen years, who cannot bear him out of sight even for a moment ?

And, what would people think of me; how could I justify myself before them? Nay, I can never, never do what this *demon* has asked of me. (*Turning again to Kaikayee.*) Be-gone, you wicked woman, perish, go to ruin. I cannot and will not do what you have asked of me. (*Wailing.*) Oh! my dearest Rama, my darling boy (*Faints again and falls into his wife's lap. By then it dawns and Sumantra, Dasaratha's confidential minister and charioteer, who has been commissioned by Vasishta to wake up the king to start in time the ceremonies of the day, hastily enters the chamber and speaks, aside.*) SUMANTRA:- Everything is ready for the installation. The kings and courtiers have all assembled and the priests are ready too with all necessary accessories for starting the ceremonies I have been asked by Vasishta to wake up the king so that he may get ready for the early start of the functions. (*Then he takes a few hasty steps into the chamber and sees the king who has just then recovered, reclining in his wife's lap, looking pale, haggard and dazed, with eyes swollen with tears, and taken aback, stops short.*)

SUMANTRA: (*In a tone of consternation*) Queen, what is the matter with the king? Why are ornaments lying loose all over the place and why are you yourself in this state?

KAIKAYEE: Sumantra, go and fetch Rama at once. It will be explained to him. (*Smantra looks at Dasaratha.*)

DASARATHA : *(With a dazed look and in listless voice)*
Yes, I very much wish to see Rama. Go and fetch him here instantly.

SUMANTRA : I shall do so my lord. *(Hastens away.)*
(Rama and Sumantra enter shortly after. Dasaratha is still in the same stupor, unable to speak and sunk in apathy. Rama without noticing it goes straight to him and prostrates, saying)

RAMA : Father, I am come. Please let me know what you want of me that I have been so urgently summoned to your presence.

(Dasaratha utters just one word "Rama" in a sobbing voice and stops, unable to continue further and only tears flow out of his eyes. Rama, seeing that Dasaratha has not spoken to him nor pronounced the usual benedictions rises up and noticing his father's condition turns to Kaikayee and speaks in an anxious voice.)

RAMA : Mother, what ails father? How is it that he did not speak to me, nor did he pronounce his usual benedictions when I prostrated to him? Is he anyway angry with me?

KAIKAYEE : *(Ironically)* All that ails your father is that he has to fulfil his promise solemnly made to me. He feels himself in agonies because he has to make good his words.

RAMA: What you say sounds quaint. My father is known never to swerve from his words. He always finds a pleasure in performing his promises whatever sacrifice they may involve and that he should feel any *agony* in performing them is what I cannot understand.

KAIKAYEE: Yes, but these promises are different. They affect you, his favourite son, adversely and he finds himself in a fix.

RAMA: What can affect me so badly that I will not gladly suffer if my father's fulfilment of his promise requires it? I asked him what he wanted of me. Why did he not speak?

KAIKAYEE: Partly shame and partly the pain of giving these orders himself to you have made him dumb.

RAMA: Then, Mother, you please tell me what his promises are and what I have to do that he may fulfil them.

KAIKAYEE: Rama, your father is undecided whether he shall maintain his honour by performing a solemn undertaking very painful and unpleasant to perform or break it and court shame. It now depends on you whether you will make him an honest man by helping him to keep to his words or a perjurer for future fingers of contempt to point at. What do you say?

RAMA : Mother, need you have put that question to me ? What is a son for if he is not to help his father maintain his reputation ? The son is called a "PUTRA." and begotten that he may keep his father out of hell and would I drive him to it ? Since my father will not of himself tell me of it, you tell me please what he desires me to do. His wish, expressed through whatever lips, is a binding order to me to be most solemnly obeyed.

KAIKAYEE : Rama, I knew that you would take it thus. Now, know what his promises are to me which he finds it difficult to tell you himself. Once when I saved his life at a critical time he wanted me to seek any two favours of him. I had sought none so far and now after obtaining his solemn word that he would grant them, I named my requests. The first was that my son Bharata should be installed the Yuvaraj of this kingdom and the second that you should go to the forest and live there as a hermit for fourteen years. He is committed to them, and will you help him to fulfil these promises of his ?

RAMA : (*Quite calm and unperturbed.*) Is this all that has disturbed my father so much ? Did he fear that I would rebel against this wish of his ? Mother, he looks dazed and may not comprehend. Assure him when he gains full consciousness that I do this with the greatest pleasure that the sanctity of his words may be preserved. He need not feel sorry on my account.

KAIKAYEE: My dear boy, you would act immediately lest when your father becomes fully conscious, he may on account of his extreme love for you recant and make himself a perjurer.

RAMA: Mother, you need not be apprehensive of any delay on my part. To visit my mother Kausalya and my wife Sita, tell them and take their leave is all the time I require. I shall then, in your presence put on a hermit's robes and be gone. Please send messengers to bring Bharata here urgently so that arrangements made for my installation may be utilised for his. (*Bows to his dazed father and Kaikayee and goes with a steady step and unperturbed face. Sumantra also follows him but unsteadily and with a greatly troubled mind. Dasaratha, who seemed to be in a stupor and was looking dazedly without speaking and with tears flowing from his eyes throughout this conversation wakes up and calls beseechingly after Rama.*)

DASARATHA: Rama, my dear boy, come back. Do not go. Listen not to this tigress. She wants to kill me, tigress, sorceress, witch. (*Faints.*)

(*Curtain drops*)

SCENE—2.

A room in Rama's palace. Sita in preparation for Rama's coronation is suitably dressed and adorned and in a happy mood is awaiting Rama's return. Her attendants are standing behind at some distance.

SITA : Today is the day appointed for Rama's coronation when I have to sit by his side on Ayodhya's throne. I have fully prepared myself therefor and am eagerly awaiting Rama's return who has gone to his father, urgently summoned by him, perhaps to hasten him in his preparations.

Rama enters alone with slow steps hanging down his head, and stops in front of Sita. He is slightly trembling and his face betrays sorrow.

SITA (*in surprise*)—How is it, Rama, I see you enter thus? Where are your regal emblems? Where the multi-ribbed royal umbrella white and round like the full moon, and where the attendants fanning you on either side with swan white fans as you walk along? Where is your golden chariot, drawn by four spirited steeds, fleet-footed, decked with golden ornaments & the fully caparisoned elephant, huge like a hill? Why have you not been preceded by heralds singing your praises and proclaiming your birth and deeds? And how is it that you are not accompanied by learned Brahmins chanting the holy Vedas and showering benedictions on you? Instead, how is it I see you gloomy in this glad hour of your coronation?

RAMA : (*sadly*) Sita, these insignia are not for me. I have to go to the woods for fourteen years, leaving the throne to my brother Bharata. Such is the wish of his mother Kaikayee who sought it in fulfilment of my father's undefined promises to her, of yore, & I am bound by these promises my father gave. I hurried here to take leave of you. You are an

intelligent woman well brought up and well-taught and need little advice from me as to how to conduct yourself during my absence. Never speak in praise of me in the presence of Bharata, for a well placed person relishes not the praise of another. Nor put on airs before him but behave like a simple woman. Lead a religious life with morning ablutions and worship of God and be reverent towards my father. To my mother be a dutiful daughter ministering to her needs, and do not behave any differently towards my step-mothers, Kaikayee and Sumitra. Never do, or think of evil towards Bharata or Satrughna, for they are dearer to me than my own life and Bharata will be the future *king*. A *king* cannot certainly tolerate any evil intended against him.

SITA: (*slightly annoyed*) Rama, by such talk, you make even a woman like me, feel amused. A father, a mother, a brother and children have their own independent lives to live enjoying the fruits of their own deeds, but a wife's life is merged in that of her husband, partaking of his fate and fortunes. They that have ordered your banishment to the woods have ordered mine too along with you. To a wife her husband is her destiny in this world and the next too; nor parents, nor children nor friends are of any avail to her. If you have to tread the unexplored forest paths. I shall go in front of you. With full confidence take me with you. A wife, walking by her husband's side, however hard be the path, finds it far more comfortable than to fly

in an aerial car, and much nobler too. True to my wifely duties, I shall ever be with you in your wanderings through fiercest forests teeming with tigers, wolves and other cruel beasts. My brave hero, while your ability to protect others from danger in such a forest is undoubted, could it be believed that you cannot protect me? Roaming the forests in your company I shall enjoy its beauties, its hills and dales, its streams, rivers and pools, lotus-bloomed, bathing in those waters and eating the wild fruits and roots along with you and shall never cause you any trouble. I can spend eternity with you in this manner, let alone fourteen years; but *apart* from you, I cannot spend even a moment, be it in heaven. So, my lord, take me with you and do not try to turn me back from this resolution of mine.

RAMA: Sita, I am aware of your noble birth and your righteous mind, but you have not fully assessed the hazards of a forest life. I know what they are. It is not merely the danger from wild beasts that you have to fear. The thundering roar of unseen cataracts and water-falls, eerie whine of the tempestuous winds blowing through caves and hollows, the night sounds of the forest arising from the trumpeting elephants, roaring lions and tigers and the shrill cries of night-birds are terrifying enough to shatter the bravest nerve. The wild streams and pools are not merely lotus flowered, but abound with crocodiles, whirlpools and quick-sands. The

paths are rugged strewn with loose stones and thorns and covered by sword-sharp blades of grass. Thick and thorny bushes bar your way and huge snakes and deadly scorpions lie unseen across your path. The air is filled with insects that sting you to despair. You have often to live only upon ripe fruits that drop from high trees and sometimes starve even without them. You may have also to pass through arid deserts with no water in sight. Such life is not suited to you. So, abandon your thoughts of accompanying me and remain here engaging yourself in godly deeds.

SITA: Rama, when my father married me to you, he fully believed that he was marrying me to a real hero and not to a woman in the garb of man. While I am by your side not even Indra, the celestial king can do me any harm, why speak of wild beasts or other dangers. And do the trials of forest life which you have spoken of, exist only for me and not for you? If you are willing to face them, why not I whose right place as your wife is by your side? You think I was wedded to you only to share your comforts and not your trials? In woe as in weal I am your constant mate. The very horrors you have mentioned seem to me to be additional reasons to go with you. I may mention yet another reason why I want to accompany you. Some fortune tellers who examined my palm while I was still unmarried and was residing in my father's house have foretold that I was destined to have a

forest life. If I am so destined is it not better that I spend that forest life in company of you? If inspite of all this you refuse to take me with you and will abandon me here, I declare I shall put an end to my life by taking poison or falling into the fire. I cannot spend a day apart from you.

RAMA : My dearest wife, I must confess that I cannot live without you either. But before asking you to go to the forests with me I wanted to make sure whether you were willing to stand such a trial and go through the difficulties I spoke of. Since as an ideal wife, you are firmly resolved on it and could not by any means be dissuaded from it I shall gladly take you with me. Now, in place of the preparations you had made for being seated with me on the throne quickly prepare yourself to accompany me to the forest.

SITA : (*joyously*) Oh, my good lord and husband, how happy you have made me! (*Hugs Rama fondly and the curtain drops*).

SCENE—3.

The room of worship in Kausalya's apartment. Golden images are placed in a golden mantap and articles of worship like flowers, Saffron etc. are contained in plates as also fruits and various other eatables in golden plates, bowls, cups etc. Lighted silver lamps are placed round the mantap.

Kausalya, Rama's mother, bathed and wearing a clean silk sari is seated on a plank in front of the mantap,

throwing flowers, rice etc. on the images and Sumitra, Lakshman's mother, is seated by her side similarly washed & clothed. A brahmin priest is chanting mantras as Kausalya is worshipping. Enters Rama followed by Seeta, Lakshman and Sumantra. Kausalya seeing Rama immediately gets up with a broad smile and rushing towards him hugs him fondly saying:

KAUSALYA: Most welcome my boy. What a happy day! Your noble and generous father, the king, is intending to instal you as the Yuvaraj this day. Go and pay your obeisance to him and get his blessings.

RAMA: Dearest mother, unknowing what great grief is presently pending over you, you are so happy, and woe me that I should shatter that bliss of yours. I am coming from my father. At the behest of Kaikayee, he is investing as the Yuvraja of Ayodhya not me, but Bharatha, her son, and me he has ordered to go to the forest there to live for fourteen years as a hermit. Kaikayee is rather urgent about my departure and hence I have hurried here to take your blessings.

(At hearing this Kausalya is stunned and falls down in a swoon, and Laxman's face becomes furious Kausalya, being tended, recovers shortly and sits up).

KAUSALYA: *(Sorrowfully)* What an unfortunate woman I am. A Senior Queen, yet neglected by the king and treated by Kaikayee like less than her maid, I lived in great humiliation and sorrow until, quite

late in life, I begot you With your birth I got fully engrossed in you and as you grew up so handsome, so lovely, so good and so intelligent that all the world adored you and grew fond of you I forgot all the insults I had suffered and all my misery and became extremely happy once more. I had hoped that when you became the Yuvraj I would get some status again in the Palace and could live an honoured life. But the all powerful Fate seems to intend it not. Oh! Why were you ever born to me to raise me to such a pinnacle of happiness only to be hurled down again from that height into deepest sorrow by losing you and become more miserable than before. I wish I had remained barren all through. I had then only one grief, that I was childless, but giving birth to you I have exposed you to countless difficulties. How could you, the first prince of the State, brought up in every comfort and luxury, face the dangers and rigours of the forest for fourteen long years? What have you done to Kaikayee that she should condemn you to such life? Why was not Kaikayee content with getting the Crown for her son and why should she in addition drive you to the terrible forests? Does her hatred of me extend to such extreme that she should heap misery on you too?

LAKSHMAN: (*Raging*) What shame, what injustice! Mother I cannot understand this. By the law of the land and the practice that prevails in our dynasty, Ayodhya's throne rightly belongs to Rama, the eldest son of the family, and what right has father

to gift it away to another and deprive Rama of it? (*Turning to Rama*) And Rama how can you resign it either in deference to the designs of a wily woman? Our father is a sensuous dotard quite in the grip of his youthful wife, a mere lump of clay in her hands to be moulded as she likes. As such his promises to her are not deserving either of regard or obedience by us. Brother, give up your idea of going to the forest and insist on your right. I shall see how our father and Bharatha with all their army can deprive you of it.

KAUSALYA: Rama, did you hear Lakshmana? Why give up your right and why go to the forest? Resist as he says and save me from the immense agonies that I must suffer by your deserting me.

RAMA: Mother, it is unthinkable to do as you desire me to. Dasaratha, our father, is the sovereign of Ayodhya and he has every right either to crown me or to send me to the forest and it is not for me to question it. That I should rebel against his wishes and disregard them would be most heinous of me. I cannot do what Lakshman says and what you desire me to. (*Turning to Lakshman*) Lakshmana, I am sorry that you should speak in such a strain about our father and Kaikayee who is no less your mother than Sumitra or Kausalya. Our parents are always venerable to us and it is not for us to judge their acts. Can we ever discharge our debt to them, the sufferings they have gladly undergone

for our sake, the sacrifices they have willingly made for us, the anxieties they have felt on our account? I hold that it is our sacred duty to implicitly carry out our father's wishes. There could be nothing more sinful than to challenge them. I can never be deflected from the position that I have taken up.

KAUSALYA: Am I not your parent too? Are *my* wishes too receive no considerations from you? Have you not known how dutiful sons of yore have obtained great merit by faithfully serving their mothers, remaining with them? My sweet son, my dear boy, go not leaving me here.

RAMA: Mother, I beseech you, do not try to dissuade me from that resolve. It will be vain and only cause pain. Please give me your consent to go. Do not be grieved. You say you have bravely borne suffering many a year before my birth. Please bear them now for another fourteen years. These years will soon be over and I shall return to your bosom to make you happier than before.

KAUSALYA: My child, as you have resolved to go and will *go*, why should I stay here without you? You are my joy in life and let me have it to the full by going to the woods with you, rather than remain in this Palace, which without you, becomes bare and desolate to me.

RAMA: Mother, such action must not be thought of by you. A wife's place is by the side of her

husband. Our father has grown old and he will be greatly grieved at my separation which he has ordered with no self will. I cannot rely on Kaikayee tending him with sufficient care. It becomes all the greater your duty to look after him and console him. Please remain here and serve him as you ought to. Mother, I now ask for your blessings and leave to go.

KAUSALYA: Rama, since you will not change your mind, I shall abide by what you say. Go, my darling boy, and return triumphant. May all the Gods protect you during your sojourn. May all the elements be kind to you; may the seasons be mild to you; let not the sun scorch you, nor the wind blow hard against you; nor insects, worms or serpents molest you. Let the spirits of the woods, hills and streams look after you; and may the Rishis and their wives be kindly to you. Let the Supreme Lord, our God, take full care of you and bring you back triumphant, safe and sound to your mother's bosom waiting your return eagerly. *(Blesses Rama. Rama bows to his mother and turns to Lakshmana, who is still full of anger).*

RAMA: Lakshmana, I am well aware of your attachment to me, but do not throw yourself into a rage at what has happened. Calm yourself and cure your passions. I shall be away. Behave towards Bharatha as you did towards me and show no displeasure at his becoming Yuvaraj. Above all be respectful to your parents and always carry out their wishes.

LAKSHMANA: Brother, I cannot share your views in this matter and accept the injustice done to you. I do not see what crime you have committed to be exiled to the woods. But since I am unable to alter your mind, I shall keep company with you in your exile. We have always been inseparable and I do not see how I can keep away from you for fourteen long years. I shall serve you in the forest and together we can better protect ourselves against its dangers and smoothen its trials.

RAMA: It is not a bad idea and if you are keen on it I raise no objection. Since Sita is resolved to accompany me and would not be dissuaded from doing so your coming too would be a great help in protecting her. (*Then they all bow to Kausalya and Sumitra*).

SUMITRA: (*Raising Lakshmana and addressing him*). My dearest boy, you have made me proud of you that you have chosen to accompany Rama to the forests. Know that your place is always by his side. Look upon him as your father and Sita as your mother and serve them accordingly. Make their safety and comfort your first concern and yours next. Minister to all their needs and desires and make their forest life bearable for them. Go, my boy. May God protect you and keep you good.

LAKSHMANA: Mother, I shall implicitly carry out your advice to me. To serve Rama and Sita is indeed a pleasure to me.

(*Curtain drops*)

SCENE 4

(A clearance bordered by trees in a forest at the foot of the Chitrakuta Hills. In the distant background are a number of huts belonging to Rishis and one within the clearance belonging to Rama. Smoke is seen rising in columns from the remote huts and there is a fire in front of Rama's hut also. In the distance is a meandering river. On the sward in the clearance Rama and Sita are reclining and Lakshmana is sitting a little away from them. Rama and Lakshmana are in ascetic robes with their matted hair tied on the top of their heads. Their strong bows lie by their sides and their quivers hang on their backs.)

SITA: What are the ordeals of forest life and where are the dangers, Rama, by listing which you tried to scare me from entering it? Is it the unceasing sound of the chanting of the holy Vedas by ascetic Brahman Rishis and their lads, or the sight of high columns of smoke that rise up from the sacrificial fires reaching the skies as though to point out to us the way to heaven, or the ennobling company of Rishis' wives helping their spouses in their daily meritearning rituals that you wanted me to caution against? Or is it the matutinal baths in the sincleansing waters of Mandakini or my daily chores of cooking the meat you & Lakshmana bring from your hunts for our food or our simple and healthy meals on fresh plucked fruits and fresh dug roots of the forest, seated in nature's dining-hall,

or is it our nightly sleep on couches of new plucked leaves and grass with the Moon and the Stars bathing our bodies in their celestial lights that you wanted to warn me against? Or, is it our walks along the shady banks of the river and the wooded glades, smelling the sweet scents of fresh opened flowers and listening to the warblings of uncaged birds or watching their flights as they emerge from their unseen nests that you thought I would tire of? How exciting the encounters with lions and other fearful beasts of prey which, fully protected by you and Lakshmana, I, with honest pride, watch you kill? Is it this that you thought would frighten me? Rama, was this the life that you tried to deprive me of? How much pleasanter and healthier this life than in the palace attended by a hundred servants catering to your unwanted wants, surrounded by sycophants pouring insincere praises into your ears, and cramped by unmeaning and unending ceremonials? Oh! how glad I am that I warded off your objections and came.

RAMA: I am glad. Sita, that you like and enjoy this life, but we have just begun it and there are yet years of it go. I hope that you will find them all as pleasant and safe. As for me, with you for company, and Lakshmana to assist us both, exile is nothing but pleasant.

LAKSHMANA: (*who was idly looking in front of him suddenly gets alerted and turning to Rama and pointing a finger to his front*) Rama, do you not notice that

huge column of dust moving towards us? And see how scared beasts are running away hither and thither from that direction!

RAMA: (*Looking up and also surprised*) It may be that some mighty monarch is come on a big hunt accompanied by his whole army. We can faintly hear the neighing of horses and trumpeting of elephants and rumbling sounds of chariot wheels to the accompaniment of clattering hoofs. (*Such sounds are faintly heard.*) Get up that tree and see if you can make out what it all is.

(*Lakshmana climbs the tree and watching intently for sometime.*)

LAKSHMANA: (*in a half angry tone.*) Rama, it is the Ayodhya army that is marching hitherward. I cannot be mistaken about it. I recognise it by its banners and I can even see Bharata and Shatrughna riding on their elephants. I very much suspect that Bharata, not content with his mother driving us to the woods, is coming here himself with his army to find and kill us, lest you return to claim the throne after your exile. Put out the fire at once. The smoke may betray our presence here. What an avaricious wretch he is! He should be destroyed with no compunction. Just say brother, 'yes' and I shall from this height shower arrows on them and slaughter Bharata with his whole army and Shatrughna too.

(*Lakshmana draws the bow.*)

RAMA : (*Laughing*). Lakshmana, come down. I know you are a great warrior, but do you think Bharata is any way inferior to you and with his army behind him? And why this talk of a fight? I am sure Bharata is coming here with no warlike intentions. I know him full well and I can tell you he has no ambition for the throne and has been no party to his mother's schemes. I very much believe he is coming here with the army to invite me back to Ayodhya and take me there in state.

(*Enter from a side Bharata dressed like a hermit and Sathruhna with Vasishtha, the family priest, Sumantra and some other ministers and generals. They have not perceived Rama, Sita and Lakshmana and are looking about in search of them. The latter seeing the new comers all stand up*)

BHARATA : This is the foot of Chitrakuta mount where we were told they were residing, They must be somewhere here.

(*Then looking in front and seeing the group.*)

BHARATA : Ah! here they are (*Rushes towards Rama with tears in his eyes and falling on his feet clasps them tight. Sathruhna also does similar by Rama raises them both up by the shoulders and embraces them.*)

BHARATA : (*Aside. What a fate that I should see Rama in this state dressed like a hermit and an ascetic and living in the forest, who should always have resided in palaces clad in royal robes. To think that I should have been the cause of this all! Aloud.*)

Guruji tell our mothers that we have found Rama, Sita and Lakshmana and bring them here.

RAMA : Bharata, how is it that you have come here leaving the kingdom, and our aged father alone? When I left him he seemed scarcely able to bear his sorrow at parting from me, and if you and Sathrugna have also left him he would surely be crushed by it. It is not right that you should have come away from him. I trust he is well and you have taken over many of his kingly duties relieving him of their burden. And how are you discharging your duties? Do you strictly observe the principles that we have been taught and follow the traditions of our ancient house? Have you chosen for your ministers men of learning, old in wisdom and old in experience and taking their counsels in all important affairs? Are you careful that no state secrets leak out and reach our enemies' ears? Are you patronising the Arts and literature? Are you encouraging good men and punishing evil doers? In short have you been treading, as ruler, the path which our forebears have pointed out to us?

BHARATA : Brother, why should I concern myself with the administration of the kingdom when you the rightful ruler both according to seniority of age and superior knowledge and capacity are there to take care of it? Our venerable father, I am sad to inform you, is no more and the throne is thus vacant. Please come and occupy it. (*Rama swoons and falls down on hearing the news of his father's*

death, but revived in a short time by Sumantra's ministrations gets up.)

RAMA : Oh revered father, you loved me so much and now that you are dead who would rejoice at my return ? He who would have been thrilled with joy on seeing me back is dead. What is there to attract me to Ayodhya when my exile expires ? Alas ! I was not destined to be at your bedside when you died, nor Lakshmana. Bharata and Shatrughna have been more fortunate and been able to minister to your last wants and perform your funeral rites. You two have thus proved to be truer sons to him than Lakshmana and I. But Bharata, how did our father die and what last message did he leave for me ?

BHARATA : Brother, nor we, Shatrughna and I were fortunate to be present at our father's death-bed. Unable to overcome his grief at your departure to the forests he succumbed to it and died not many days after and even before we could be sent for. It seems to have been my miserable lot that I should have been the cause of all these woes.

RAMA : Bharata, you need not blame yourself for what destiny had willed. Come, we shall go to the river, bathe and offer oblations to our departed father and return. *(The brothers go to the river and return accompanied by Sumantra. Meanwhile the widowed queens of Dasaratha have arrived there accompanied by Vasishtha. Rama, seeing them, prost-*

rates to his mother Kausalya, and his step-mothers, Sumitra and Kaikavee in turn, and Lakshmana and Sita do the same. Rama then sees Vasishta and goes and prostrates to him. They all squat on the ground.)

KAUSALYA: (*Looking at Sita.*) Sita, my dear girl, what 'fate is this for king Janaka's daughter, Dasaratha's daughter-in-law and wife of Ramachandra himself to abide in this dense forest devoid of human beings? How your face has faded under the rigours of such hard life even like a lotus that has faded under the heat of the summer sun!

RAMA: (*Looking at Bharata.*) Bharata, what means this garb of yours, the hempen cloth and the tiger skin? A sovereign should not be dressed like this.

BHARATA: Brother, my wicked mother has done an evil deed evilly advised by a wickeder woman. She had hoped to gain sovereignty for me thereby, but has instead brought death to her husband who most doted on her. To me she has brought eternal shame and to herself universal scorn and invectives besides widowhood. She has by this act barred for herself all access to Heaven and opened wide the gates of Hell for her future abode. We have come here to repair what part of her evil deed could yet be mended. It is the prayer of myself, our mothers, our guru and the ministers and generals that are come here that you should return to Ayodhya at the head of this army and occupy its vacant throne and thus restore gladness to the

hearts of all your subjects that are now distressed. I propose to go to the forest in exile in your stead and it is therefore that I am come dressed as an ascetic. You are aware that the well established custom of our family is that this ancient kingdom of ours should be ruled by the eldest son of the last king. It is not meet that you should break this law.

RAMA: (*Embracing Bharata with great fondness.*) My dear boy, I was all along conscious of your great nobility. So born and so brought up, so intelligent and so educated and so highly moral I knew that you would never sin for the sake of a kingdom. I could find no fault or blemish in you, but I cannot approve your speaking of your mother this way. You were not right in accusing her in this matter. Unquestioning respect is what we owe to our parents, as much to our mothers as to our fathers and their words must be sanctimoniously carried out by us. Our father had full rights either to crown me as heir to his vast empire or banish me to the woods. He has through his wife, and thus a mother to myself, ordained that I dwell in the forest as an ascetic for fourteen years. Thus ordered how can I do otherwise? Our father, just before he went to heaven, effected a partition between us two, the kingdom to you and the exile to me. How can I disrespect it and how can you either? You go back to Ayodhya and rule the kingdom as he desired.

BHARATA: Brother, how can you burden me with a load that I cannot bear? You are the one best fitted to discharge the onerous duties of governing this empire. Can a donkey be capable of carrying the load of a full grown horse? Can other minor birds keep up with an eagle in its flights? I compare with you no better. Please take up the administration yourself. Regarding my mother she has acted most vilely and it was unfortunate that I was not present at Ayodhya at the time to prevent it. She deserves the cruelest death for it and I would have inflicted it on her but that matricide is a very heinous sin. And our father has also acted very unwisely in yielding to his young wife in mad love for her. He has acted as a senile dotard and this mother of mine vilely. As such their behests are not worthy of being obeyed.

RAMA: Bharata, I am grieved to hear you persist in speaking of our parents thus. As I have told you and you are yourself well aware the irredeemable debt we owe to them for their loving care of us, the anxiety they have suffered on our account and the difficulties they have willingly undergone in bringing us up can but be partly discharged by our full respect and obedience to them. It is not for us to argue or analyse their desires or commands. It behoves me and you, therefore, to each do what he has been told to do. And why do you charge your mother with vile intentions? I do not see that she is to blame in this matter at all. She who bore

such great affection to me could never have wished me ill of her own accord. She has been only the instrument of the all powerful destiny that had ordained that this should happen. It could not be explained otherwise.

VASISHTA: I am your family preceptor and have taught you all. I am therefore entitled to give you my advice. You are a Kshatriya and a hermit's life in a forest becomes not one of that sect. Both your right and duty enjoin you that you are to rule, for which function you have been well trained and fitted. It is not Bharata's wish alone but that of all of us, your teacher, ministers and subjects that you assume the kingship. Please make us all happy by acceding to our request.

RAMA: Sire, I admit that there is great weight in what you say, but I have just now explained to Bharata how my duty to my parents requires me to do as they have bid me. I cannot be shaken from this resolve.

BHARATA: Brother, all our arguments have not moved you nor our requests. This kingdom has been thrust on me and I feel altogether incompetent to administer it. If you still refuse to take up the throne I shall lie down at your feet and will not get up nor eat until you agree to become the king. (*Lies down at Rama's feet*).

(*Rama raises him up and seating him on his lap.*)

RAMA : Bharata, my boy, this procedure is adopted by a creditor to make his reluctant debtor to pay. It is not fair that *you* should adopt that course towards me. You say that you are incompetent to rule the kingdom. Who would believe it of you, who are so wise and intelligent and have been fully trained for it? This request of yours arose from your nobility of heart so rare in the world. Having gained a kingdom you yet cherish not to keep it for yourself but desire to pass it on to me feeling that I have the better right to it. Rule it for these fourteen years that I shall be away and I promise I shall return at the expiry of that period and relieve you of the burden.

BHARATA : Brother, since all our exhortations and requests have been of no avail I shall do as you bid. But not feeling competent to administer the country under my own authority, I request you to give me your sandals installing which as the sovereign I shall rule as their deputy in trust for you. And know that all these fourteen years I shall be eagerly awaiting your return living in a village away from the capital and if you all not get back on the morrow that the period expires I shall jump into a fire and burn myself.

RAMA : I shall comply with this request. Take the sandals.

(Hands him his sandals which Bharata reverentially presses to his eyes and carrying them over his head

goes thrice round Rama. The sandals are then placed on a caparisoned elephant and wild cheers go up. After bowing to Rama they all depart.)

RAMA : Lakshmana, this place is too near Ayodhya and I am afraid we shall have too many visitors here and be frequently disturbed. We shall go further south deeper into the forest cutting ourselves away from Ayodhya.

(Rama, Sita and Lakshmana go and the curtain drops.)

ACT. II.

SCENE. 1.

(A clearance in the midst of a forest. In one corner of it is a hut built of twigs and leaves. There are bushes and clumps of trees bordering the clearance and behind the hut. Sitting on a rock in front of the hut are seen Rama and Sita, Lakshmana standing a little behind. The two brothers wear a loincloth made of hemp and their matted hairs are tied on the top of their heads. They hold in their hands steel bows and on their backs are hung quivers filled with glittering arrows)

RAMA : Sita, thirteen years of our exile are over and now only the last remains. During these years we have passed from Ashram to Ashram receiving respectful hospitality from the Rishis and many a valuable gift. We have wandered through thick forests too and faced many a danger. Viradha

who tried to carry you away was killed and many other Rakshasas in the protection of Rishis in accordance with the solemn word I had given to them. You have braved all the dangers and endured all the hardships without a murmur of complaint. We shall wander no more and spend this last year in this peaceful & beautiful spot. (Pointing to the valley.) Look how the Godawari winds through the valley below fringing its banks with trees stately and green, and see the distant hills standing majestically around.

SITA: Rama, until you drew my attention to it, I had not realised that we had spent thirteen years in the forest. To me this has not seemed an exile at all. This forest life has suited me quite well and I greatly prefer it to life in the palace. The only thing that troubled me was that you had to kill so many of the Rakshasas and incur the enmity of that race. And now as you say no more wandering for us, we shall stay here until we return to Ayodhya.

(At this point emerges from among the clump of trees on the opposite side of the stage, Surpanakha, a large uncouth female figure)

SURPANAKHA: *(Aside)* Who may these people be? Gathered in this lonely forest, the domain of Rakshasas, where no human being can tread, they, in a happy mood, are looking on nature's beauty unconcerned. *(Seeing the hut)* And they have

built a habitation too. They know not perhaps what danger surrounds them, or knowing, care not. The two men clad in fibre robes and with matted hair worn above their heads have the appearance of hermits. But why then the fearsome bows in their hands and the quiver at their backs bristling with arrows like serpents' heads? And why a woman in their midst fair as a goddess? They have the look and bearing of heroes. Ah! how handsome the elder man is! Broad chested, wide shouldered, long limbed, his eyes large and lustrous and lotus shaped, and carrying his head like a lion, he has every attribute of the noble born. He is fairer far than Madana, the god of love and beauty. What woman can resist his looks? At his very sight my heart flows to him unchecked. I must and will marry him this instant. I shall disclose myself to him at once and enquire who he is and who his companions, whence they have come and why, and then declare my love to him. (*Approaching the group and addressing Rama, aloud*). Fair Sire, who may you be and this woman by your side and who the youth behind, who looks very much like you? And why have you wandered into this forest and made your abode here? Are you not aware that this is the frontier of Ravana's domains and infested with fierce Rakshasas inimical to all mankind and hermits specially? You are dressed like hermits but your arms and looks proclaim you as warriors. I am curious to know all about you. Please answer me truthfully.

RAMA : (*Aside*). By her uncouth figure this woman looks like a Rakshasi; but even then I must tell her the truth who is sworn to utter no falsehood. (*Aloud*). Listen lady, I shall truthfully tell you who we are and why we are here. There was on this earth a King called Dasaratha who was equal to the Celestials in might and fame. I am his eldest son, Rama by name. This is my younger brother Lakshmana and this, my wife Sita. Bound like a dutiful son, to maintain the sanctity of my father's troth to his young wife Kaikayee, my step mother, who craved for her son the succession to my father's throne and my own exile into the forest for fourteen years to lead a hermit's life I entered the woods as she desired. This my wife Sita, unwilling to live separate from me, insisted on following me to the forest unmindful of its hardships and dangers. Lakshmana, my inseparable brother, would not think of keeping away either and accompanied us to protect and serve us. Having dwelt for several years in various Ashrams we have come to this forest now to spend the remainder of my exile. I have thus told you lady who we are and why we are here. Now please tell us all about you.

SURPANAKHA : Sweet and noble prince, I shall answer you truthfully as you have. Know me as Surpanakha, sister of the mighty Ravana, son of Visravas, king of the Rakshasas, conqueror of the celestials, and lord of the three worlds. My

other brothers are famous too. Kumbhakarna, noted for his size and voraciousness and his long and deep sleep is the next. Vibhishana, the youngest, though a Rakshasa, follows not their path but is given to gentle ways. Khara and Dushana are my other brothers, both gallant warriors guarding this frontier province of Ravana. I am the pet sister of my brothers and never crossed in my designs, I roam their domains as I like. Oh! most handsome prince, having acquainted you of my greatness and my liberty I now declare my intense love you, and offer myself to you. Your resplendent beauty, which I ween, no Rakshasa nor Deva possesses, has carried away my heart and it shall know no rest until I have made you my husband. Why care you for this simple woman who has neither the beauty nor the grace that should befit you? Discard her and marry me instead, and taste the sweets of real love with me as wife. I shall rid you of her and this brother of yours by consuming them, and unencumbered we two can roam about this beautiful wood, locked in love and never tiring of it.

RAMA: (*Smiling*) Oh Surpanakha, great lady, you have honoured me much with this offer of marrying me. But, I am already a married man and tied to this woman for life. However plain and simple she be I have trothed my word before the God of Fire to take her as my life-mate, and love and protect her until death. By marrying me, you can at best be a junior wife to her

and does that suit your royal birth and high connections? But this brother of mine is, as you see, free to marry you. In looks, birth, build or merits, he is no inferior to me. It is well that you wed him. You fit each other nicely as the Mount Meru and the daylight falling on it.

SURPANAKHA: (*Surveying Lakshmana from head to feet*). (*Aside*). Yes, the two look very much alike and this is younger. I see not why I should not marry him instead. On second thoughts I feel he suits me better. (*Aloud*). Come Lakshmana, be my husband and let us disport ourselves here.

LAKSHMANA: Oh princess! What is this you think of? Know that I am but the servant of Rama come to attend on him and his wife. Would you, royal born, be content to be a servant's spouse and serve my master's wife along with me? Nay, it is Rama that you should wed, the master. His exile is coming to a close and returning to Ayodhya he will be crowned the King thereof. As his wife you will share his throne and be honoured by all his people. A senior wife he may now have but with your superior beauty and charm it may not be long before you supplant her in Rama's affections. Is it not ever the way of the world that the younger wife becomes the favourite? It may even be that neglected and thrust into obscurity Sita may pine away and die leaving you as the supreme wife. Therefore madam, you will be wise to marry Rama and not me.

SURPANAKHA : (*Pondering a little*). True, too true, It is Rama and not you that I should wed. But this woman is in the way. Rama with his silly notion of being faithful to promises made before a fire thinks not of discarding her. I shall remove her out of the way by devouring her. (*Rushing towards Sita with outstretched hands roars.*) — Thou wretch that standest between me and my love, thou shalt perish this instant and be eaten up,

SITA : (*Shrinking with fright*). Oh Rama, Oh Lakshmana this Rakshasi is going to kill me.

RAMA : (*Obstructing Surpanakha*). Lakshmana, we have dallied too long with this passionate woman. She has not realised that we were but jesting and has taken it all too seriously. It mattered not so long as it led to no mischief; and amused us. But now this Rakshasi is proceeding to do violence to Sita. Stop her and deal with her suitably.

LAKSHMANA : (*Dragging Surpanakha by her arm.*) Stop thou wicked monster; thou art going too far. (*Dragging her further to his front, takes a sword and cuts off first her nose and then her ears.*),

SURPANAKHA : (*Howling with pain takes her hand to her cut off nose and then to her ears.*) Haa my nose! Oh my ears! Ye heartless brutes, I thought ye beautiful and brought ye my love and ye requite me thus by cutting off my ears and nose and defacing me for ever. All my love is now turned to bitter

hatred and ye shall soon know what it is to treat me thus, what revenge I am capable of, Oh, it pains, it pains terribly. (*Goes away howling.*)

RAMA : Me seems Lakshmana, we have incurred powerful enmity. It behoves us to be extra vigilant in Sita's protection.

(*Curtain drops.*)

SCENE 2.

(*A clearance in another part of the forest. Military huts are seen at the back. In the front is seen Khara surrounded by his brother Dushana and a number of Rakshasa captains. A howling sound is coming from within the side wing.*)

KHARA : Who is it that is howling so ? That sounds like my sister.

(*Enter Surpanakha, reeling, and with blood dripping from her face; and wailing loudly falls on Khara's feet shouting :— " Oh brother, Oh Khara, I cannot bear the shame. "*)

KHARA : (*Surprised and dismayed*). It is my sister Surpanakha and she is profusely bleeding. (*Bending down to her face*). What has happened to your face ? Where is your nose and where are your ears ? They have been cut off. Who could have dared to commit this outrage ? (*Surpanakha, without speaking continues to shriek and roll about on the ground.*) Calm yourself, sister, and tell me what has happened. Who has dared to dismember you thus ? Which unthink-

ing fool has ventured to prod a cobra quietly lying? He that hath done this foul deed does not know what crime he has committed. He hath rashly thrust his neck into Yama's noose and invited death unto himself. There is none in all the three worlds that can rouse my wrath and yet live. Tell me now who has committed this atrocious crime and I assure you that neither Indra nor Yama nor the Creator himself can save him from his doom.

SURPANAKHA : (*Sobbing and whining with pain*). Listen brother. Two princes have come to dwell in Panchavati. They are youthful and are dressed like hermits. They are most beautiful in appearance with shapely limbs and soft. Their eyes are long and wide like the petals of the lotus flower. They are clad in robes of flax, live on roots and fruits, and seem to follow the path of holy men. They are brothers, sons of king Dasaratha, and are named Rama and Lakshmana. In beauty they equal Gandharva kings and possess all royal attributes. It is difficult to be certain whether they are men or Gods. Let that be. I saw in their midst a woman, most fair, youthful and fully decked with dazzling ornaments. It was on this woman's account that the two youths treated me thus as though I had no protector to avenge me. Oh, to think of their cruelty to me! I am intent on revenge. I am thirsting to drink their warm and frothy blood. Oh dear brother, help me to fulfil my wishes.

KHARA : Get up sister and compose yourself. I shall see that your desire shall soon be gratified Hey,

who is there? (*Claps his hand*).

(*Enter a sentry*).

SENTRY : What is your bidding, my lord ?

KHARA : Sirrah, go and bid some fourteen bodyguards to repair here this instant.

SENTRY : Yes, my lord. (*Goes and re-enters with fourteen strong and able Rakshasa warriors armed with spears.*)

RAKSHASAS : We are here, my lord.

KHARA : (*After an inspection of them*). Yes, they will do the job quite well. (*Addressing the soldiers.*) Ye guards, follow my sister who will lead you to a couple of men who have done a serious wrong to her. She is bent on immediate revenge. You kill the men and let her drink their blood. Take them, sister, and gratify your wish.

SURPANAKHA : (*With a pleasant smile*). Thank you, brother. Now, come you warriors. (*Exit with the Rakshasas*).

(*Re-enter Surpanakha after some time, crying, "Help, oh brother, my protector, help" and falls down on his feet and rolls about on the ground*).

KHARA : What is it now again ? Why have you returned so soon and are crying ? The fourteen Rakshasas I sent with you are quite reliable. They are all competent, valiant, fierce and invincible. They would never fail to accomplish what is entrusted to them. While I have given you such held

why do you come here again to wail and whine. Get up and cast off your grief and tell me soon what ails you now.

SURPANAKHA : Well brother, it is not the two brothers that were killed but your fourteen "invincible" warriors whose blood is soaking the ground. It took no time nor was it any trouble for Rama to slay them all with his keen and unerring arrows. I got terrified and came running here for protection. I see danger lurking in every nook and corner. Relieve me of this dread. Oh Khara If you slay not this Rama, my bitter enemy, I who am disgraced with my ears and nose cut off, cannot survive the shame and shall kill myself here in your very presence. You proclaimed yourself to be a great hero and I believed you so far. But now I ween you are no match for Rama. I suspect you know it too and are therefore avoiding him. If you are a hero really, go and kill these two brothers in battle and rid Janasthan of them who have proved themselves to be a great plague and menace to the Rakshasas. Else what is the use of your being stationed here as the guardian of the frontier? Rather skulk back to Lanka with your wife and children and there hide yourselves. Your inaction and continued presence here will only cast disgrace on you and it will not be long before you will be killed by Rama and Lakshmana.

KHARA : Silence sister. Enough of these taunting words. How could you doubt my valour? Even

the celestial army could not stand before me in battle. Why speak of these two mortals who, you say, have been exiled from their own kingdom and are half ascetic? I know why thus you spoke of me. Be content. I have under me an army of fourteen thousand strong and fierce Rakshasas and I shall this instant march with it against those brothers and killing them shall avenge the injury done to you, the insult hurled at us and the damage they have inflicted on the Rakshasas so far. (*Turning to his brother Dushana.*) Now, brother, bid the whole army prepare for war. Let them all be fully armed and be ready to march. Get my chariot also harnessed with war-like steeds and see it fully equipped with necessary weapons of war.

DUSHANA : Your orders, brother, will immediately be carried out. (*Goes.*)

SURPANAKHA : I am so glad. I see not how they can escape now the punishment they richly deserve.

(*Curtain drops.*)

Scene 3.

(*Above the clouds Clouds are moving on the stage floor. Half a dozen Devas, Rishis and Gandharvas are seen standing among them. Throughout the scene a combined and confused din is continuously heard coming from behind the screen, of horses neighing, elephants trumpeting, car wheels rolling, harness and armour clanging, feet trampling and Rakshasas shouting.*)

A DEVA: This is not a sight to miss. The Asura troops full fourteen thousand strong, led by the redoubtable brothers, Khara and Dushana and their general Trishira and armed with every kind of deadly weapon, are on the march to give battle to the Raghava brothers, Rama and Lakshmana. Here is an occasion to witness many an act of skill and daring.

A RISHI: Ah, the odds are heavy against the two brothers. We had assurances from them that they would rid the world of evil Rakshas and protect us. May the Supreme God guard them and give them the victory.

A GANDHARVA: The odds may be great against Rama and Lakshmana but the issue cannot be in doubt. Notice the evil omens that pursue the Rakshasa army and its leaders clearly indicating their defeat. Donkey coloured and red tinged clouds are raining blood drops in front of their army; the swift horses harnessed to Khara's chariot are tripping frequently even on level ground; a huge vulture is circling over Khara's chariot; vixen are running in front of the army making a moaning sound. The sky is overcast with black clouds spreading darkness underneath even during the middle of the sky. The wind is blowing hard with a whining sound.

ANOTHER DEVA: Yes, Khara's left shoulder is shaking like a leaf in the wind. Involuntary tears

are flowing from his eyes denoting dire danger to him. Surely he must be very daring that without minding these clear signs of defeat he is pushing on to the battle, intent on destroying Rama and Lakshmana.

ALL : Ah, the army has approached Rama's hermitage and the clash is to begin soon.

A DEVA : What is this ? Rama is sending Lakshmana away, bidding him to take Sita to some sheltered cave and guard her there. And Lakshmana in obedience to him is reluctantly leading her away. Does Rama intend to face the Rakshasa horde alone ?

ALL : May the Almighty protect him and victory be his.

A DEVA : He has donned his armour and has raised his bow ready to shoot. See how he frowns. Such anger seems to suffuse his face as Rudra's was at the destruction of Daksha's sacrifice.

GANDHARVA : Look, the battle has begun. Thousands of spears, javelins, maces, trees and iron bars are hurtling through the air towards Rama.

RISHI : But, Rama has cleverly shivered them all with his arrows before they could reach him and they have all fallen to the ground in pieces.

GANDHARVA : And now Rama has taken up the offensive. Arrows are flying [from his bow in scores and

hundreds and each is unerringly finding its mark. Rakshasas are falling in thousands their bodies pierced right through and those still unhurt are running away in panic.

DEVA : But, Dushna has rallied round the fleeing Rakshasas and a group of some five thousand is again sent against Rama. It is approaching him with weapons raised.

DEVA : Look, Rama has taken out the Gandharva Astra and planted it in the bow. Thousands of arrows have issued from it, fully filling the air. The Rakshasas have all been struck and the field is strewn with their dismembered bodies. The earth is drenched with their blood which is flowing in streams. I think the Rakshasas will now retire.

GANDHARVA : Nay, the slaughter has only further enraged the Rakshasa leaders and Dushana has himself proceeded to the attack in his chariot with another five thousand following him.

RISHI : Ha, with four blazing arrows Rama has killed the four horses harnessed to Dushana's car and another crescent shaped one has severed the driver's head from his body.

DEVA : But, Dushana with his chariot rendered useless has jumped to the ground and is angrily rushing towards Rama whirling a "Parigha" weapon.

GANDHARVA : Look, look. his progress has been arrested. Both his arms, cut off by an arrow each,

drop to the ground. Now Dushana himself hit by a third arrow reels and falls dead to the ground.

DEVA: How soon the battle field has been cleared of all living warriors except for the two generals, Khara and Thrishira and a small remnant of the Rakshasa army on the one side and Rama on the other, but it is strewn with the dead and dying bodies of thousands and thousands of Rakshasas and heaped up with broken arms and chariots and slain horses and elephants.

DEVA: Listen, Khara and Thrishira are conversing among themselves. Perhaps they mean to retire from the field.

(Voices from within the wings.)

KHARA'S VOICE: (*Sadly.*) Ah, we marched here fourteen thousand strong and the whole army with all its leaders has melted away excepting for you and me and the few stragglers there, half hiding among the trees and shaking like frightened deer. Many a time we have fought huge armies of Devas, Asuras and others and not once have we known defeat. Our enemies have always fled before us unable to stand our onslaught. But this mere man, single-handed and fighting on foot has vanquished all the fourteen thousand of us; and so quickly too. He has disclosed such dexterity in the use of his bow that none could discern how or when he draws his arrows from the quiver, plants them in the bow or shoots them but one sees that in a moment the

whole air is filled with them. It is thus that we have been defeated. Oh, I can never survive this shame. I must fight him now, even if alone, and conquer or die. Driver, lead the chariot against the enemy.

THRISHIRA'S VOICE: Nay master, that task shall not be yours while yet your lieutenant lives. Only watch and allow me please to engage Rama. If I kill him as I hope to, our dead brothers will be avenged and we shall return triumphant to our camp with our great shame wiped off. But if I am killed instead, it is then the time for you to enter the fray.

KHARA'S VOICE: So be it. Proceed, valiant Thrishira, and take the remnants of our army for your help.

DEVA: See, Thrishira is rushing his car towards Rama and is raining arrows on him.

SECOND DEVA: But to what effect? Rama has warded them all off and with own arrows destroyed Thrishira's car with its driver and steeds.

RISHI: But Thrishira jumping to the ground has again covered Rama with arrows.

DEVA: Oh, four of them have struck Rama on the forehead. (*Rama's voice from within the wings.*) Well done Rakshasa you seem to be a better fighter than the rest and I congratulate you on the correctness of your aim. But how soft your arrows have touched my forehead like gentle flowers. Now

take this one from me. (*Thrishira is heard groaning and falling.*)

RISHI: Oh, Thrishira is hit and falls dead to the ground and the surviving Rakshasas are flying pell-mell.

ALL: Long live Rama the valiant. Glory be to Rama the victorious.

DEVA: Look how furious Khara is at Thrishira's death. He is himself proceeding to the field in full armour with his chariot filled with various arms.

(*Khara's angry voice from within the wings.*) Rama, you have shown rare valour in destroying my army, but the victory is not finally yours. You have yet to fight me, Khara, whom even the Devas dread.

RAMA'S VOICE: Oh, thou art the Khara, that is unconquerable? Where in hiding wert thou whilst the carnage of thine army was going on? Why, thy words seem to be braver than thy deeds. If thou art really a hero prove it in fight. (*Angrily.*) Vile Rakshasa, the tormentor of holy Rishis and unarmed men, terrorizing the world by thy cruelty, now that thou hast entered my field of vision thou canst get back alive. I have long waited for thee and the fate that hath overtaken thy followers shall now be thine too and the Rishis and all good men can here-after abide in these forests in safety.

KHARA'S VOICE: No vain words nor boastful ones make a hero of a man. A good warrior never brags.

With these arrows I shall soon silence thy wagging tongue.

DEVA : See, see the fury of Khara's attack. It has made even Rama retreat three steps. The air is thick with flying arrows. The fight was nothing so exciting before.

DEVA : Oh, Rama is hit by several arrows and his armour falls to the ground in bits.

KHARA'S VOICE : Ah, what sayest thou to that ?

RAMA'S VOICE : (*In anger.*) Don't exult so soon—now take these.

DEVA : How swiftly Rama's shafts are flying from his bow. They have covered Khara's chariot and lo, the chariot, the steeds, and the driver have all been crushed. Khara has jumped from the broken car and hurled a battle axe at Rama.

GANDHARVA : Oh, the axe has cut the string of Rama's bow and swept it off his hand.

RAMA'S VOICE : This Rakshasa is no mean enemy. He has shown greater skill in fight than they that preceded him and he should not be treated lightly.

RISHI : See Rama has quickly picked up his fallen bow, restrung it and has let fly fourteen blazing arrows all together.

ALL DEVAS : Hurrah, they have all hit Khara and he falls dead to the ground. There is now not a single

Rakshasa in the field alive. See Rama smiles and heaves a sigh of relief. Long live Rama, the victorious, long live Rama the liberator of the world from evil doers and the protector of the righteous. (*The Devas shower flowers on Rama and blow conches. The Gandharvas sing and dance.*)

(*Curtain drops*)

SCENCE 4.

(*The stage, a little darkened, is strewn with fallen trees, dead Rakshasas with severed limbs, killed horses and elephants, shivered arms, and broken chariots. Well behind is seen Rama's hermitage and Rama in front of it resting on his bow.*)

SURPANAKHA: (*Enters with a ghastly face, hair dishevelled, robes torn and disarranged.*) Terrible, terrible. What din, what carnage. The earth is sodden with blood and one tumbles at every step upon fallen trees, broken chariots and dead bodies of Rakshasas and horses, scattered all over the battle field. To think that one person, a mere man, has wrought all this havoc! My two mighty brothers have been killed by him and also all the fierce Rakshasas that had been stationed at Janasthana. I have been spared perhaps because I am a woman. I must flee from here to 'Lanka and work my revenge through my brother Ravana. (*Exit.*)

(*Another Rakshasa Akampana enters slyly at the back of the stage looks this side and that and sneaks away*)

*in the opposite direction. Enter Sita and Lakshmana.
Sita runs to Rama and embraces him)*

SITA: Oh, my incomparable husband, the world's greatest hero, how proud I am to be your wife.

LAKSHMANA: (*Kneeling down before Rama.*) Thy glory, brother, will ring in all the worlds and will be sung in all the ages until the world itself ceases to be.

(Curtain drops.)

ACT III

SCENCE 1.

(The Court Hall in Ravana's palace at Lanka. Ravana is seen reclining on the throne, with slave-girls fanning him on either side. One girl is kneeling balancing a tray in her hand on which are placed jewelled cups and flasks of wine. Other girls are ministering to Ravana's needs in various ways. On each side of the throne is a row of costly chairs, on which are seated Ravana's ministers and Courtiers richly dressed. Dancing and singing are going on in front of Ravana, who is appreciating them, sipping wine at intervals. Enter Surpanakha in haste with dishevelled hair and disarranged robes as in the last scene and her loose hair partly covering her face.)

SURPANAKHA: (*In seeming disappointment and anger.*)

You voluptuous king, always on pleasure bent, is this the care that you bestow on your kingdom's affairs, the thought it needs? What king by the employment of vigilant envoys and secret agents keeps not himself informed of what is happening each moment in the different parts of his domain and the kingdoms outside can retain his kingdom

long? Which ruler spending all his time in low pleasures enquires not into his peoples' needs and takes not measures to meet them can long command their love and loyalty? Which monarch that looks not into the state of his finances and his army and does not maintain them ever strong, can continue powerful? Which sovereign though seeking timely counsel of his ministers and give them due regard yet follows not his own judgment, and which king that checks not the excesses of his deputies and controls them not efficiently, can retain his hold over them for long? You seem to be a king of that indifferent type. That is how you are not aware of the dire and imminent danger that is this moment threatening you and your realm.

RAVANA: (*Laughing.*) Ha, ha, ha,! Is this woman mad that she should warn me of impending danger and try to teach politics to me? What danger can come to me? Secure under the boon of indestructability that I have gained from Bramha, the creator, by long and austere penance, I have fought many a war and vanquished all my foes, striking such terror into them that they all run into hiding even at the mention of my name. I am the monarch of all the worlds and I can think of no enemy of mine that dares to attack me and face me in war. Even the elements are afraid of me. What king has earned a better right than I to rest and spend my further time with wine and women? Where can any danger lurk for me? This woman must have

had a bad nightmare and grown crazy with false fears. Relax, sister, and resting in yonder seat watch the dance. It may cure you of your fears. (*Then turning towards her, he sees Surpanakha's full face for the first time, the hair that had covered it partly having slid away and discovers the disfigurement.*)

RAVANA: (*Amazed and laughing*) Hello! What is this? What have you done to your face? You must be really mad to have cut off your ears and nose. You do indeed look funny. (*Bursts out laughing.*) Ha, ha, ha.

SURPANAKHA: (*Indignantly interrupting his laugh.*) Is this a laughing matter? Does my disfigurement amuse you that you should laugh at it, rather than excite your wrath at the wrong and insult that has been done to me? Nay, it is more your insult than mine that a mere man should have dared to deface your sister thus. Your brothers, Khara and Dushana, were more alive to it and marched with their whole army to chastise the perpetrator of this crime, but alas, they and their whole army of fourteen thousand Rakshasas instead of venging themselves against the insulter, are lying dead slaughtered by him. It was to tell you this that I hurried here and found you indulged in drink and dance.

RAVANA: Ha, ha. This woman is surely getting madder and madder. She must have completely lost her sense to tell me this silly tale. Would you

really want me to believe that some man has killed my redoubtable brothers and their whole army to boot?

(At this moment Akampana all in terror comes running breathlessly and falls down on Ravana's feet.)

AKAMPANA: *(In a faltering voice.)* My Liege Lord, I am the bearer of terrible news and dread to relate it to you. I crave your pardon first, for bringing you such a disastrous report.

RAVANA: Why, this is Akampana, my able agent stationed in Janasthan to watch events there and bring me news thereof. He is terribly upset and is shaking like a leaf in the wind. *(addressing Akampana.)* Sirrah, get up, compose thyself and tell me what has shaken thee so.

AKAMPANA: Sire, the terrible scenes I saw in Janasthan and the dread of your Majesty's full wrath lighting on me when you are told of them have altogether un-manned me. Kind Monarch, please forgive me for bringing you such bad news.

RAVANA: Fear not, thou shalt have my pardon provided thou givest me ungarbled and undistorted facts.

AKAMPANA: Sire, I shall tell you but the plainest truth and that is terrible enough. *(In stammering voice,)* Your brothers Khara and Dushanna and their army of fourteen thousand have been killed in

battle by a lone man in the fields of Janasthan and there is not now one Rakshasa there left alive.

RAVANA: (*Surprised and incredulous.*) What? Has a wave of insanity swept over Janasthan! First my sister and now this Rakshasa are telling me the same mad story. Could there be any substance in it? Sirrah. Dost thou know what thou art saying and hast thou realised what will be thy fate if there is ought of untruth or exaggeration in what thou sayest?

AKAMPANA: My lord, I am well aware of it and I am also aware of the more serious consequences to me should I withhold what your Majesty should be told.

RAVANA: And yet thou dost assert that what thou hast told me is true?

AKAMPANA: Yes Sire, the simplest and barest truth.

RAVANA: The fellow dare not lie to me. Bnt it is all too unbelievable that my invincible brothers who, unaided, have so often routed the celestial armies and made Indra flee before them, who have in no battle known defeat, should have been vanquished and slain by a mere man! My sister coming from there tells me the same story too. Could it be possible? Nay, confirmation is needed ere I credit it as true and not hallucinations of their terror-stricken brains.

SURPANAKHA: Brother, I vouch for every word that I and this Rakshasa have told and if better confirmation is needed you can find it in my face.

RAVANA: Ah! Yes, your face. Yes, yes, your face. It is disfigured and that tells something. Tell me sister, how it all happened.

SURPANAKHA: One day during my wanderings I spied a group two men and a woman sitting on an eminence viewing the scenery around. I approached them curious to know who they were and why they were there. The two men were dressed like hermits, but they were strongly armed. On enquiry I learnt that they were brothers, Rama and Lakshmana, two princes of Ayodhya wandering the forests in self-exile at the behest of their father, Dasaratha. The woman was Rama's wife and was *exquisitely* beautiful to look at. While conversing with them, they took great offence at a part of my speech and at Rama's order his brother cut off my nose and ears and the fact that I was your sister, which I took care to inform them, did not deter them. Tormented with pain and burning with shame and vowing vengeance for the perpetration of this foul and audacious deed, I ran to my brothers Khara and Dushana and told them of the injury done to me. They got furious and Khara sent some fourteen Rakshasas on a punitive mission, but when they were all killed, the two brothers themselves set forth followed by their full army to chastise the guilty, with the result that I and this Rakshasa have

told you. No one was spared except me, perhaps because I was a woman, and this Rakshasa, perhaps because he was in hiding. This Rama is reported to have killed many more terrific Rakshasas, in fact all that he encountered in his wanderings. I fear brother, danger lurks to us in them and it was to warn you of it that I came here.

RAVANA : I can no more disbelieve you, sister. I am sorry for so lightly treating your injury. Grieve not. I shall soon suitably avenge you. (*Turning to a courtier.*) Order my chariot to get ready and let it be well equipped with arms. (*Addressing the courtiers.*) The Court is dismissed. you will go home. (*Exit all except Ravana, Surpanakha and Akampana.*)

AKAMPANA : Sire. I would ask you to order the army also to go with you.

RAVANA : What? What an insulting suggestion! Fellow, thou art getting impudent. Dost thou think that I require the help of an army to punish those men? Begone. (*Exit Akampana.*)

SURPANAKHA : Be not angry, brother, at what this Rakshasa says. He speaks from knowledge and they are words of wisdom. I also have witnessed how Rama fights and counsel you caution. I do not know how and whence he derives the power, but it is superhuman. Arrows fly from his bow without intermission in hundreds and thousands and soon fill the air. I am told that he has obtained

from Rishis several powerful and divine missiles too. I would not advise you to face him in fight.

RAVANA: What! you also count me a coward? You say he is a menace to us and because this man fights better than others of his kind, shall I sit with folded hands and allow him to grow in impudence and mischief? Are you not aware of the boon of indistructibility I possess and while I can without any fear or danger face and rout celestial hosts, should I get afraid of him, a man, and avoid him? How can I avenge you without fighting him?

SURPANAKHA: Brother, I have never doubted either your valour, your courage, your skill or your other abilities. You are well versed in political and military science and you fully know that there are other ways of destroying an enemy than by fighting him and what you can easily gain by trickery why risk the use of force to obtain? I can show you a way to overcome Rama without a fight.

RAVANA: Yes, there is sense in what you say What is it that you suggest to me to do?

SURPANAKHA: I told you Rama's wife was beautiful, but not how much so. Words fail to describe her and can give you but a vague notion of her exquisite beauty. Every part of her, her every limb is perfect and inexpressibly superb. No apsara woman, nor any among the Devas, Nagas, Gandharvas, Rakshasas or others can approach her in looks, grace or charm and among all the thousand women

of your harem there is not one half so handsome as Sita. The instant I set my eyes on her, it struck me that I should win her for you. She would be a rare jewel in your harem and fitter to shine there than waste her youth and beauty with an aimless wanderer. Indeed it was because I sought to secure her for you that the two men disfigured me thus.

RAVANA : (*Impatiently*) Stop, you have stated enough. What you have said about Sita has whetted my passion. I shall go this instant, kill the brothers and bring Sita at once. I want no delaying methods.

SURPANAKHA : Curb your impatience brother. Haste loses more than it gains. There is, as I told you, a surer, easier and safer way to accomplish what you desire.

RAVANA: Tell me quick then, what you want me to do. I cannot hold my patience much longer.

SURPANAKHA : Guile is what I propose in this matter. Manage to isolate Sita from her male protectors and when she is alone enter her presence in disguise and stealing her bring her away here to Lanka and hide her in your harem. Rama losing her and not being able to find out what has happened to her will pine away and die and his brother Lakshmana will not outlive him long. Thus with no risk at all, you will at once rid yourself of two dangerous enemies, avenge the death of your brothers and many other Rakshasas and my shame and gain for yourself a lovely mistress.

RAVANA : A good idea, sister, a very good idea indeed.

I had not rated your wits very high, but I see that you can at times be a good counsellor. A plan has already suggested itself to me and I shall go and put it into execution at once. Thank you, sister, for your information and advice. (*Exit.*)

SURPANAKHA : I have now set my revenge to work. I have touched Ravana on the right spot, and crafty as he is mighty, and doubly so when a woman is concerned, I am sure, he will not fail to achieve what he sets upon. Thus my heart's desire will be fulfilled *this* time. That hateful woman, who now reigns as the queen of Rama's heart and for whose sake he spurned my love and defaced me, will now rot in Ravana's harem as one of his thousand mistresses. And the two haughty brothers, with Sita abducted, will die of shame and sorrow. Suffering may be hard, but revenge is sweet.

(*Curtain drops.*)

SCENE 2.

(*Sea-shore on an island. In the back-ground is a clump of palm trees with a hut among them. In front, on the sands near the water's edge is sitting Maricha, a Rakshasa clad in hermit's clothes. His eyes are closed and he is obviously in meditation. The swish of a swift moving vehicle in the air is heard from above in the skies. Maricha opens his eyes and looks above and with some disgust and apprehension.*)

MARICHA : (*Aside.*) Oh! It looks like Ravana. I do not know why he is coming here. I fear it bodes no good for me.

(*Ravana alights within the screen and as he is coming upon the stage Maricha gets up and disguising his displeasure and putting on a smile of welcome respectfully advances towards him with folded hands and says aloud.*)

MARICHA : Hail O king, your august presence hallows my humble hut, but my lord, may I know what causes this royal visit, this honour to a trivial subject of yours?

RAVANA : Maricha, I am in dire need of your help and have come to seek it.

MARICHA : (*Expressing surprise.*) What, Ravana, the ruler of Lanka, the mighty king of all Rakshasas, the conqueror of Indra the celestial king, the terror of Devas, Nagas and Gandharvas and the lord of all the three worlds, whom even the elements fear and obey, to need my help. an insignificant Rakshasa, now turned a hermit! Joke not, my lord.

RAVANA : Of what avail are my powers and prowess, my greatness and glory, when love's pangs are torturing me? I have often stood Indra's thunderbolts and they could do nothing to me; but this bodyless Ananga's flowery darts are working havoc in my heart and have set it aflame with the fire of love. I can find no peace nor rest until I obtain my heart's desire.

MARICHA : Why then come *here*, my lord, to a *hermit's* lonely cottage while in your own harem at Lanka you have a thousand beauties, all picked by yourself from among Deva, Gandharva, Naga and Rakshasa maids, each one fully capable of and eager to quench that flame? Repair to them, oh king, and assuage your pangs in their sweet embrace.

RAVANA : Nay, Maricha, my harem contains not the beauty I seek. She is no Apsara, nor Gandharva, nor Deva, nor Naga maid and is only a mortal woman; but none among Devas, Nagas or Apsaras possesses half her beauty as has been reported to me.

MARICHA : (*Aside in alarm.*) A mortal, and fairer far than any Deva, Apsara, Gandharva or Naga maid! It can only be Sita, Rama's wife! Has this voluptuous fool dared to cast his evil eyes on her for unlawful love? (*Aloud in an alarmed tone.*) Have you, my lord, by any chance, fallen in love with Sita, Rama's wife?

RAVANA : It is she indeed, it is she. You have at once recognised her by the description I gave. Really then, she must be most fair and her beauty could not have been exaggerated to me. Ah, this doubles my ardour to possess her soon.

MARICHA : Ravana, which inveterate enemy of yours desiring your utter ruin and that of all your kin, nay that of the whole Rakshasa race, has put this mad and dangerous idea into your head? That

villian could not have devised a more perfect and effective plan for your total destruction. Have you not heard of Rama's might ?

RAVANA: I have, and it is therefore that I have come to you for help, not in cowardice though. Although I am not afraid to fight with him, in *this* affair I prefer to gain my goal by a ruse.

MARICHA: My lord, you have quite enough of beauteous wives. I beseech you, go to them for your pleasure and *by no means* ever cross Rama's path. You can tread on a black cobra's hood and yet be safe, you can enter a hungry lion's den and come out alive, you can even put your neck into Yama's noose and yet survive, but woe be to you if you ever excite Rama's righteous rage; for no power on earth or heaven can save you from his just wrath and no place in all the three worlds can hide you from where he cannot ferret you out. And you hope to gain Sita by a ruse indeed ! Have you not heard of her virtues, her constancy and her devotion to her husband ? You think she will yield to your sinful amours ?

RAVANA: Maricha, enough of your advice and warnings. Nothing can shake me from my determination. I am bent on having Sita and with your help *I will* have her. As for her virtues, I have yet to find a woman, who cannot be lured by my power and wealth, who would prefer the forest's hard life to the luxuries she can find in my palace.

MARICHA : (*Fully enraged.*) Thou evil king, does thy sinful wickedness know no bounds? Do not even considerations of thine own safety stay thee from going to the extreme? I counsel thee again and again as thy well wisher, desist from this mad and evil design. Naught but harm will come to thee and thy race out of it. But, if thou shouldst still persist in rushing to certain ruin, do not drag me along with thee. Leave me out of thy plans whatever they be. I have had plenty of experience of Rama's might. In his early teens, when he was not so fully skilled in the science of archery, when I with Subahu went to foul Viswamitra's sacrificial fires, the arrows that Rama shot at me blew me over the seas and dropped me leagues away near a desert island's shore which I could gain alive with great difficulty and the arrow that he shot at Subahu killed him outright. It took me long to get over that blow and I could never more think of facing him openly. Again much later during Rama's wanderings in the woods, when I with some others of my fellows roaming in the guise of boars molesting Rishis, saw him coming, and remembering my old wrongs and desiring revenge rushed against him along with my companions with sharp tusks and bared fangs, he killed the others and spared my life this time too, hurting me however so severely that I could not bear the pain. This happened again and again till I opened my eyes to my sinful ways and realising that I was spared that I may repent and reform, I became a hermit and am doing penance in

this island as you know. Though I have turned good, I am even now so mortally afraid of Rama that not only the hearing of his name, but the sound of any word beginning with a R throws me into a tremor. And have not his boyish episodes reached thine ears? On his way to Vishwamitra's Ashram he met Tataka, my ferocious mother, and killed her outright. At Janaka's court he shivered Rudra's bow which the many wooers of Sita had failed even to lift, on his way back he overcame Parasurama, the warrior sage, before whom all Kshatriya kings trembled. He displayed divine powers too by relieving Ahalya of her curse. It is such a person that thou hast thought of antagonising. If even after this narration thou likest not my counsel and art still bent on thine own destruction, do go but expect me not to follow thee. Rama will not spare me my life again.

RAVANA: (*Very angrily.*) Maricha, thou seemst to have forgot to whom thou art speaking. Remember that I am thy king. Which subject could address his sovereign thus and yet live? This impudence of thine deserves death. If I have not struck thee dead at once, it is because of thy past services to me and the service I require of thee at present. I came not here to seek any counsel or learn morals of thee, but to command thy obedience. If I put my order in the form of a request, it was because of my regard for thee, and thou hast mistaken it. If thou dost apprehend a *possible* death at Rama's hand should thou go on my errand, know that

certain death awaits thee here this moment at my hands shouldst thou refuse to go. I have borne thy arrogance and thy traitorous praise of an enemy in derogation of thine own liege lord, but I cannot overlook thy disobedience. Now choose.

MARICHA : (*Aside.*) This wilful and cruel Rakshasa will *not hesitate* to carry out what he threatens. On the other hand, Rama will surely kill me should I cross his path once again. But between the two, it is preferable to die at Rama's holy hands and gain salvation than be killed by this vile Rakshasa and go to perdition. There is also some merit in dying loyal to my king. (*Aloud.*) My lord, I seek your pardon for the words I spoke. It was not through impudence that I took up the role of a mentor and addressed such strong words to you. Believe me it was solely my concern for your Majesty's safety and that of the Rakshasa race that made me so frank and bold. I am your subject and servant bound to obey you at all times. Please order me what I have to do and I shall loyally carry out your behests.

RAVANA : Now, thou speakest like Maricha of yore. Thou hast been too much obsessed with fear of Rama and I had to be harsh to exorcise thee of it. Mind not my angry words. Thy reward for success—carefully carrying out this mission shall be rich. Now fully listen to the plan. Thou art an adept in the art of disguise and cunning and no Rakshasa is better so. Thou canst take on any form thou

desirest and act the part fully naturally. I want thee to appear before Sita like a fascinating deer with golden hide and silver spots and so frisk and frolic in her presence that she will be bewitched and long to have thee for a pet. She will then no doubt, with feminine nature, importune Rama and his brother to catch thee and take thee to her. Then cleverly lure the brothers away to a distant part of the forest. If only one of them should follow thee, after leading him far enough, assume his voice and cry out for help in a heartrending wail as though he has been in a disastrous plight and urgently needs the other's help. Hearing that sound of distress the other will surely run for his help. When Sita is thus left alone, I shall present myself before her and plead my love. If she should not yield to it, I shall take her away to Lanka by force and keep her in my harem. Go now, *shed* thy fear of Rama and do everything as I have bid thee. With thy tact and ability, I am sure that thou wilt not fail and the reward for thy success shall be half my kingdom.

MARICHA : (*Aside.*) He may safely offer a much higher prize for I shall never return to claim it. (*Aloud.*) I shall depart, my lord, to carry out your instructions. May you come to no harm. (*Exit.*)

RAVANA : He has gone. I have full faith in his capacity to carry out the plan to complete success. With the boon of Brahma protecting me I cannot see

what harm can touch me. Sita is already as good as mine. I shall go now and prepare myself to play my part in the plot. (*Exit.*)

(*Curtain drops.*)

SCENE 3.

(*Scene. The same as the first scene in the II Act. Sita is sitting on a rock in front of her hut viewing the scenery and quietly humming to herself. She suddenly becomes alert as a fawn comes into her view, and sits erect intensely gazing at it. The fawn does not however appear on the stage. Sita, still gazing at the fawn with pauses between remarks.*)

SITA: (*Within herself*) What a strange animal is this! It looks like a fawn, but what fawn has a golden hide spotted with silver? What lovely body, what slender legs, and how gracefully it walks as it is slowly approaching me nibbling the foliage on this side and that! What a lovely creature it is! It is coming nearer and nearer. I should sit quiet, one with nature making no movement nor sound. Oh! it has stopped all on a sudden and become alert, its body taut, its neck erect, its ears pricked and its eyes fixedly looking forward. What has alarmed it? Did it sight me and is it running away? Ah, it seems to have got reassured and bending its head again is calmly grazing the grass. But how tense and beautiful it looked when it seemed to be scared. How large and liquid its eyes and how shapely its slender snout! What a

lovely pet it would make! I should show it to Rama and ask him to capture it for me.

(Meanwhile Rama comes and stands by her side his eyes also fixed on the fawn. Sita feels his presence and without taking off her eyes from the fawn.)

SITA: *(Aside.)* Rama is here. *(Aloud.)* Rama did you see that animal?

RAMA: I was watching it from the hut and finding it so strange came out for a closer and fuller view.

SITA: Is it not beautiful?

RAMA: It is exquisite.

SITA: Does it not very much look like a fawn?

RAMA: It is a fawn, but I had never seen another such before.

(Lakshmana also comes and stands by Rama's side.)

RAMA: Lakshman, did you notice that fawn? What do you think of its wonderful beauty?

LAKSHMANA: Brother, I have noticed it and I feel it is too beautiful to be genuine. I have never seen its like before and I think such an animal cannot exist in nature.

RAMA: You argue strangely Lakshman. Because we have not seen such a thing before, does it mean that it is not real? Have we not in our wanderings come across many a strange bird and beast?

SITA : (*Ignoring the conversation between the brothers.*)

Rama, I am quite enamoured of this fawn and I long to have it for a pet. I could learn its tricks and play with it when I am alone during the rest of our exile and when we return to Ayodhya, we can show it as a wonder to the ladies of the Royal Household. Will you please catch it for me, or even bring it dead if it cannot be captured alive? Its skin would well adorn our room in the palace at Ayodhya.

LAKSHMANA : (*In some alarm*) I beseech you, brother, attempt it not. I verily believe this beast is no deer, but some trap set for us by the wily Rakshasas. Ever since the incident at Janasthan, they are boiling with feelings of revenge, but unable to face us openly and being adepts at deception they have resorted to wiles.

SITA : (*Interrupting.*) Listen not to him, Rama. He imagines danger where there is none and wants to deprive me of a pleasant plaything. What harm can this charming innocent animal do? Rama dear, do catch it for me.

RAMA : Lakshman, I can well understand your anxiety for the safety of Sita and myself and I am fully aware of your vigilance in protecting us and deeply appreciate it. It is well to be careful, but in this affair, I am afraid, you are stretching caution too far. A beautiful thing need not be rejected as unreal because it is rare. Sita has set her heart on this "play-thing" as she calls it and no wonder she has. Since she has followed us to the woods,

she had shocks and terror in plenty, but little to amuse her and play with. She craves for this one and let her have it. I shall follow it and bring it to her alive, if possible, or dead otherwise. And even if it be a Rakshasa as you apprehend, what danger can there be in my following it? You think, I cannot discover the guise in time and suitably deal with the wily one? I shall go now and soon come back with the fawn. But, be ever watchful in guarding Sita. As you have realised, we are surrounded by cunning foes and cannot be too vigilant in her protection. I order you on no account to leave her side until my return, which shall be soon. (*Rama goes bow in hand and the quiver hanging at his back. Sita looks on watching his progress, but Lakshmana is sullen and silent.*)

SITA: Rama is now quite close to the animal. I believe he will catch it in another moment. Oh! the animal has evidently scented his approach and has skipped away—What long and elegant leaps it takes, skimming over the tops of bushes like a bird. Ah! every movement of it is a beauteous sight. I hope it will not escape. Now it is grazing calmly again and Rama too, running behind the thicket, unobserved by it, has kept pace with it. The fawn is slowly moving away but Rama, still under cover is following it, stalking it so cleverly. (*After a pause.*) Oh! they have both passed out of sight, but I am sure Rama will catch it at the next attempt and bring it soon to me. (*observing Lakshmana silent sullen.*)

SITA: Lakshmana, why are you so sullen? Are you nursing a grievance that you were over ruled?

LAKSHMANA: Truly madam, I am not happy over this affair. I have a sad foreboding that it spells some evil to us.

SITA: Fie on you Lakshmana, Why have you turned timid? It is against your nature. Cheer up. You will soon see how unfounded your feare have been.

(Suddenly Rama is heard to cry out in a distressed voice.)

RAMA'S VOICE: Dear Sita, I am undone. Lakshmana, come to me for help; run, run to me immediately ere I am destroyed.

SITA: (*Alarmed and wailing.*) It is my husband calling for help! What may have happened to him? Was Lakshmana right and the enchanting animal a Rakshasa in disguise luring Rama to death? Oh! Why ever did I long for that vicious beast, why ever did we not listen to the cautious words of Lakshmana? Why ever did I send my darling husband on this fatal errand? Oh! vile me that should have yielded to my ill-considered desires and with feminine obstinacy insisted on getting them fulfilled? I have thereby placed my husband in great danger. (*Looks up at Lakshmana and sees him unmoved.*) What, Lakshmana, you are still here? Heard you not Rama calling you urgently for help? Why did you not fly to him immediately? And why

are you standing still yet ? What are you thinking about ? Rama is in death's throes and why are you delaying ? Run, flee, go to his side and save him before he is dead.

LAKSHMANA : (*Unmoved and in calm tones*) Mother, do not get alarmed. Be composed. I am sure nothing could have happened to Rama. I think it is only a trick to lure me away from your side and leave you unprotected.

SITA : What ! You think this is a time to talk so calmly and unconcerned ? Did you not hear Rama's clear voice that he is in dire danger and calling you for help ? How can that be a trick ? How can he wish me to be left unprotected if he did not so much more badiy need your help ? Why are you standing arguing ? Go, run, borrow wings and fly, get to his side before it is too late.

LAKSHMANA : (*Still unmoved and calmly.*) Madam, why do you unreasonably agitate yourself and make yourself unnecessarily sad ? We heard Rama's voice no doubt calling for help, but it was not Rama that spoke it. Rama can well take care of himself and needs no one's help. You think that he that sent me away from his side, when he was attacked by a fully armed and well led army of fourteen thousand Rakshasas and fought it all alone and completely slaughtered it, would now need my help in an encounter with a fawn, perhaps a Rakshasa in that form, but single ? I assure you, Rama can be in no danger and will soon be here safe and sound.

SITA : Oh ! How coolly and wickedly you are arguing standing immoveably here, while your duty was to hesten at once to Rama's side. "Rama's voice, but not Rama speaking !" What fine logic ! Go, go at once, I do not require your protection, Rama is in greater need of it. I bid you go, go immediately. If you have any real affection for Rama and any respect for my words, I bid you go without losing any more time.

LAKSHMANA : 'Revered Mother. it only shows how unnecessarily perturbed you are that you should doubt my allegience to Rama and yourself. It is indeed that obedience to him and regard for you that impel me not to stir out of here. Did you not yourself hear Rama bid me not on any account to leave your side until his return ? Be quite, lady. I see no real reason for your alarm and agitation. Your safety requires my presence here.

SITA : (*Aside.*) Oh ! He does not budge. How can I make him move ? (*Aloud turning to Lakshmana.*) Why are you so an̄xious about protecting me, who am in no present danger and quite indifferent to Rama's safety, who is in peril and is calling for help ? Ah ! I discover it now. The scales have fallen off my eyes and I see you now as you really are. Oh ! now we have been taken in, all this time ? Rama, how is it that neither you could see so far this villain's treachery ? He followed us not out of love and devotion to you, but for sinister objects. It all seems to be a deep laid plan to get entirely rid

of you and make Bharata's succession to the throne secure and this treacherous fellow has been sent to see you killed in the forests, the prize offered to him for that dastard deed being myself.

LAKSHMANA : (*Taken aback.*) Mother, what words are these that you speak? How could you be so unjust and use such cruel words to me that enter my ears like molten lead?

SITA : (*Interrupting in anger.*) They may be cruel words but true. Hypocrite, entertaining lewd thoughts about me all along and calling me "mother". Such phrases can no longer deceive me. You may have succeeded in the first part of the plot and Rama may be dead, but do you think I can ever be yours, that I shall ever consent to get into your arms?

LAKSHMANA : Oh! Stop, please stop. I cannot bear to hear such words coming from you. They churn my vitals as though with blades of steel. Please stop the cruelty.

SITA : (*Unheeding Lakshmana and wailing.*) Oh! dear Rama, what shall I do? You may have been dead by now, an unsuspecting victim to a most vile plot and this incestuous brute may take me by force. But I shall prevent it. What is life worth to me without you? I shall go and drown myself in the Godawari and end it thus. (*Makes as if she is going.*)

LAKSHMANA: (*Aside.*) Oh! how her unfeeling and unjust accusations are torturing me! I cannot stay listening to them. Rama has bid me be here and it is hard to disobey him. But this lady suspects and fears me and may do herself some harm if I stay on. I must go and Rama, I hope, will understand it all when I explain it to him. (*Turning to Sita.*) I shall go, if only to quiten you. I shall speed on and quickly return with Rama. But the interval is long enough for any harm to reach you. I can only invoke the hills and trees around, the birds and beasts that are here, all so well-fed and cared for by you to ward off all danger to you in the meanwhile. Rama is sure to be offended at my deserting you, but I shall rather brave that than keep you in such distress and in such fear of me (*Goes bow in hand and arrows at his back.*)

SITA: (*With some relief.*) Ah! he has gone at last. I hope Rama is still alive and Lakshmana will arrive there in time to save him. Ye gods, bring them both back soon to me alive and sound. (*She is still, however, in distress and holding her head in both her hands is looking down and shedding silent tears with occassional sobs.*)

RAVANA: (*Who dressed like a Sanyasi was in hiding all along inside thicket, comes out and standing in front of Sita at some distance to himself.*) Maricha has played his part full well and cleared the field for me. It is now up to me to complete the act by playing my part well too. (*Looking intently at Sita.* How beautiful she is even in

her distress! I cannot tire of standing still and gazing on her, but time is short and the brothers may return any moment. I must hurry and finish my work ere then. She is plunged in deepest sorrow and has not noticed me. I must wake her to my presence. (*Slightly coughs.*)

SITA: *Hearing the sound raises her head and seeing a holy man in front hurriedly wipes off her tears and standing up with her palms joined and saying to herself in the meanwhile—*“Oh! a holy man is come and I had not noticed his presence at all. Rama would be offended, if I should not pay due reverence to him and offer him the hospitality of the house.” (*Aloud.*) Excuse me revered Sir, I did not notice your holy presence and do not know how long I have kept you standing thus without offering you my respect and inviting you to the poor farce of our hut.

RAVANA: Worry not sweet lady. I am come but this moment. I saw you were absorbed in great grief and stood a while watching you. Grieve not lady. I can well see that your troubles will soon pass off and such royal pleasures are in store for you as no woman has had hitherto.

SITA: Indeed, I was in sorrow, Sire, and your cheering words, which in your knowledge of the future, you have been pleased to utter, comfort me very much. I shall fetch water to wash your hands and feet and place a plank on the pial of this hut, where please be seated and partake of the fruits and roots that I can offer you.

RAVANA: I am glad to accept your invitation.

(Sita hurriedly goes inside the hut and bringing a pot of water pours it on the hands and feet of Ravana, which he washes. Sita goes into the hut again and bringing a plank from within places it on the pial and seeing him seated brings him a plateful of fruits and roots and a cup of water to drink and placing them before him stands reverentially at a distance with folded hands watching him eat.)

RAVANA: *(More intent on gazing on Sita than eating addresses Sita.) (Aloud.)* Oh! divine beauty, who are you and why are you here alone! Are you an Apsara or other celestial being come down to earth to disport in the Godavari river or to meet any mortal lover? And what has distressed you that I saw you weeping?

SITA: *(Believing him to be a holy man genuinely interested in her and from whom the truth should not be hid.)* Sire, I am no Apsara nor any other celestial woman. I am a mortal, a princess, daughter of king Janaka, a saint among rulers and daughter-in-law of Dasaratha, another saintly king whose domains extend to the seas. I am married to his eldest son, Rama, the noblest of men and the greatest of heroes, who won me for a bride by a feat of arms. Married young we lived in Ayodhya for fifteen years when Rama who had to be installed as the Yuvaraj, entered the forest instead, leaving the throne to his step-brother Bharata, to respect his father's promise to his junior wife. I, of course,

accompanied Rama and Lakshmana too, his inseparable brother, fully devoted to him. Having wandered through many forests and having met many Rishis and lived in their Ashrams we have arrived here of late and been dwelling here to spend the last year of our exile. My grief concerned my husband, who has been over-late in returning from the chase. *(During this narration, Ravana is hardly taking the food placed before him but is intently gazing on Sita. Sita notices it and somewhat surprised remarks to herself)* How this Sanyasi is staring at me! There seems to be lust in his eyes. He has not paid any attention to his plate at all. I am alone and feel nervous. *(After sometime)* Nay, I may have wrongly read his thoughts and done an injustice to the holy man. It may be due to his curiosity and fatherly interest in me that he looks thus at me. I must however make sure in an inoffensive way and also hint that I am not without protection. *(Aloud.)* Sire, how is it that you are not partaking of the food at all? Perhaps these wild fruits and roots are not to your liking? I am sorry I cannot offer you better fare than these, but my husband and his brother may arrive here soon and bring some good food with them more to your taste.

RAVANA: Worry not most handsome lady, I am not starving at all. If not my tongue, my eyes are tasting a most enjoyable feast they never had before. Your incomparable beauty is food enough for both body and mind. If I had not actually seen you, I could never have believed that such

beauty existed, that even Bramha was capable of creating a woman so superbly attractive. He seems to have picked all that was most beautiful in his creation and fashioned you out of them; and having produced you he must have exhausted all his fine materials and his skill in creation too; for I doubt not, he is incapable of producing another such as you, nay, nor even half so handsome. The picture of you which I had formed from reports of your beauty I had heard was not a quarter of a quarter as attractive as what I see. But what report can adequately describe your beauty which is only to be seen to be visualised.

SITA: (*Distinctly alarmed, aside.*) My suspicions have increased. He, a Sanyasi, has been addressing me in terms which no decent man would use to a stranger woman. I must find out who he really is and his object in coming here. He has not been seen in these parts before. (*Aloud*) Most revered Sir, I am glad you feel well entertained. I have related my true story to you at your bidding and not having met your holiness during our long stay here so far, I am curious to know what Ashram is hallowed by your holy residence and what chance or object has brought you to this humble abode? Will you please deign to tell your *daughter* what she is anxious to know?

RAVANA: Sweetest, I shall be most glad to tell you, who I am and why I have come here. Indeed, I was about to disclose myself to you. I am no Sanyasi,

though I have come here disguised as one to have an easier access to you. Know me as Ravana, the mighty, who holds sway over all the three worlds and is the brother of Kubera, the god of wealth, whom I have so often vanquished. Hearing of your surpassing beauty I came to see you and seeing you my original desire to possess you has increased a hundredfold.

SITA: (*Taken aback and shaking.*) So you are the dreaded. Ravana and you have deceived me by appearing like a holy man?

RAVANA: A dread to my enemies, but not to you my darling, I am your humble slave. Be my wife and I shall place myself and all I possess at your lotus feet.

SITA: (*Angrily.*) Your proposal is most despicable and your presence here in this guise is a blasphemy. Go, get away hence before my lord and his brother arrive. Else great mischief may be done.

RAVANA: Yes, Sita, such has been my intention, to leave the place before they return, but not without you. What do you do with this mendicant Rama, who having been deprived of and driven out of his own kingdom has nothing to offer you except the hardships and dangers of this forest life? On the other hand, I am the mightiest of all living beings and possess unlimited wealth and power and can win even more by my strength and surrender all

that to you. Come with me to my capital Lanka, a most beautiful city containing splendid palaces all owned by me, where you can live in comfort and enjoy all the luxuries they provide.

SITA : (*Angrily.*) You think, I lacked the luxuries that palaces can provide? In my father Janaka's palace and that of Dasaratha too I had them in plenty since my birth and marriage. Did I renounce them all that I may seek them again in *your* palace by living in sin with you? Nay, I have all the pleasures and comforts that I desire or need *in living* by Rama's side and I want none other. Your offers are contemptible and tempt me not. I deem life in hell is more tolerable and honourable than what you offer. Vile Rakshasa, are you not ashamed even to suggest such a heinous thing to me? Get out of here. You brag of your bravery and prowess! What kind of valour is this to sneak into Rama's Hermitage like a cowardly thief disguised as a holy man, while he and his brother are away, and speak thus to me while I am alone? If Rama or his brother were here now and hear you talk thus to me your head would not have long remained on your shoulders. Get away, be-gone. I can never go with you.

RAVANA : (*Laughing.*) You think I planned all this so ingeniously and successfully that I may leave you and go alone when I have got you into my hands? I thought I could win you by persuasion and still

hope to gain you so. But time is running short, and I must depart ere they come. Since you will not consent to come of yourself I must take you by force. *(He claps his hands and his car, drawn by a pair of ash-coloured donkeys, which had been placed hidden, is brought before the hut by his driver Ravana casting off his Sanyasi's robes and appearing as himself rushes towards Sita and holding her by her hair drags her to the car placing her on it signs to the driver to go.)*

SITA : *(Resisting while she is being dragged to the car and also, while being carried away is shouting in a wailing tone. Her words get fainter and fainter as the car gets inside the screen indicating that the car is going farther and farther away. Only the first few sentences are heard while Sita and Ravana are on the stage and when the car goes inside the screen the curtain drops.)*

SITA : Oh ! this vicious Rakshasa is dragging me away and I am all alone with none to save me. Lakshmana, my constant and ever present protector, where are you now that you do not come and free me from this villain's clutches ? Oh ! I sent him away myself and with what harsh words too ! You saw through the trickery both times and cautioned me, but I with womanly folly and stubbornness did not listen to you and drove you away though you would not leave me ! Who is to protect me now ? Rama, cannot you sense that your wife is in danger, does nothing tell you that she is being dragged away ? My lord,

husband who has sworn before the Fire God to protect me always, come and free me now. Nay, neither of you can hear me. This wretch has seen to that. Ye, spirits of the wood and ye, birds and beasts of the forest, did you not hear Lakshmana entrust me to your care? If you have the least gratitude for all my loving care of you, come to my aid. Nay, you are yourself afraid of this Rakshasa and are scuttling away. There is none even to inform the brothers of what has happened *to me*.

SCENE 4.

(Another part of the forest thick with trees with a track in their midst. On one of the trees is perched Jayayu, a huge but aged eagle, half dozing. Sita's wail is again heard, but this time louder and louder indicating the approach of the chariot in which she is being borne)

SITA'S VOICE: Oh! should thus end our exile? Kaikayee will be well pleased with it I ween. With my disappearance and Rama not even knowing what has happened to me, he would scarcely hold on to life and Lakshmana, his inseparable brother, would also die. Then Bharata may occupy Dasaratha's throne uncontested and his mother be Ayodhya's real queen. But Kaikayee, I swear I shall envy you not the kingdom. Let me be only free, and I promise and I shall make Rama promise too that we shall be content to live in the forest for ever and not return to Ayodhya to claim the throne. But who is

to free me? Dasaratha, my father-in-law, was a saintly king and Janaka, my own father is one too. Could not their good deeds come to my rescue?

JATAYU: (*Slowly opening his eyes.*) I hear a woman's wail. She must be in a desperate position as she is calling for help from all objects both animate and inanimate. The names of Dasaratha, my dearest friend, and his son Rama are being mentioned too. The sound is coming from the direction of Rama's Ashram. Could it be Sita, his wife, that is the woman in distress? The sound is getting louder. The chariot must be approaching this place. Let me see who is in it. (*Cranes his neck and sees into the distance*) It contains a woman, struggling in the arms of a Rakshasa holding her tight. The car is travelling fast. (*Sita's voice is heard again.*)

SITA'S VOICE: Ravana, you say you are a king and a king ought to protect the weak and specially guard the honour of women. You say you are mighty too. I appeal to your honour, is it meet that you should come to me in disguise in Rama's absence and carry me away his married wife? You have done him a grave wrong and he is not slow or mild in punishing those that injure him. Yet, he is kind and forgiving too and protects those that seek his shelter. Leave me go and I shall beseech him to pardon you. Both right and your own safety require that you should free me. (*Ravana only laughs at this speech, but Jatayu hearing this distinctly.*)

JATAYU: It is Sita that is wailing and she is being carried away by Ravana, entering in disguise and stealth Rama's Ashram, while she was alone. I must try and free her. Alas! I am old and feeble now and can be no match to Ravana. Yet, I cannot sit quietly looking on, when a woman being molested by a villain, is crying for help and specially when that woman is Sita, my old friend Dasaratha's daughter-in-law and Rama's wife. *(Hops down the tree and slowly goes and stands in the track awaiting the arrival of the Chariot. The chariot comes on the stage.)*

RAVANA: *(Seeing the old bird in the way)* Get away, silly old bird you are standing in the way. Don't you see that the car is travelling fast? Clear out or you will be run over. *(The donkeys brush Jatayu, who holds them by the reins and stops the chariot.)*

RAVANA: *(In anger.)* Stupid bird, who are you that have arrested my progress whilst I was in a hurry? Don't you know that I am Ravana? Let go.

JATAYU: Villain, release Sita and I shall let you go.

RAVANA: *(In rising anger.)* You insolent creature, I shall learn you how to interfere in my affairs. *(Lashes the bird heavily with his whip. Jatayu enraged, strikes the chariot with its wings and at one strike the chariot breaks into pieces and the donkeys and the driver fall down dead. Ravana, full of anger, jumps to the ground and drawing his sword rushes towards Jatayu. Ravana fighting with his drawn sword and Jatayu with its bare beak, talons and its wings, Jatayu is gradually overcome and wounded in several places and profusely bleeding finally falls to the ground.)*

JATAYU: (*Weakly as it falls to the ground.*) I have done my best, but have been overcome. Time was when I could have fought this Rakshasa to victory, but now, I have grown old and feeble and cannot do more. Alas! my flight has been in vain. Sita could not be rescued and has to be left to this villain's mercy.

RAVANA: This wretched bird by its impudent interference delayed my progress and destroyed the vehicle which would have carried us to Lanka through the skies. But it matters not much. I shall carry her myself and fly. (*Turns round but does not see Sita, who during the scuffle freed from Ravana's hold has fled and hid behind the trunk of a tree.*) Oh! she is not here. Where could she escape? She must be hid somewhere here (*Peers round and spies her sari protruding from behind the tree.*) Ah! she is hid behind that tree. Now come come. (*Goes to the tree, drags her out and holding her under his right arm jumps into the air and flies away Sita still struggling and wailing. Jatayu slowly drags himself to a cover close by and lies down.*)

(*Curtain drops.*)

SCENE 5.

(*Another part of the forest. Lakshmana is coming running from one direction and Rama coming hurriedly from the opposite direction meets him and accosts him.*)

RAMA: (*Anxious and surprised.*) What! You hear Lakshmana! so that mischievous cry has deceived you too?

LAKSHMANA: No brother, it did not deceive *me*, but Sita was so much upset by it that any amount of assurance I gave her could not quiten her and she importuned me to go to your help.

RAMA: But I had bid you, on no account to quit her side.

LAKSHMANA: I did remind her of it, brother, and refuse to budge from there but she got so agitated that she started charging me with unmentionable and unbearable accusations. Even then I would have stayed and not moved, but I feared she would do herself great harm, if I did not go to you immediately. It is thus that you see me here.

RAMA: Lakshmana, you have done unwisely. I now perceive it was all a deep plot to isolate Sita from us. The fawn was only a Rakshasa in disguise as you said. It subtly drew me farther and farther away into the forest behaving as it was going to be caught but cleverly slipping away. When thus it eluded me again and again my suspicion arose and discerning at last that it must be a Rakshasa I shot at it. The arrow struck it fatally of course, and in dying, the Rakshasa, throwing off the deer's form, uttered that misleading cry, assuming my voice. It was then that I really got alarmed. I realised that it was

purposely uttered to confound you both; but I had hoped that you at least would see through it and not come to me leaving Sita alone. Not so sure, however, I was hurrying back and was shocked to see you here. I am afraid the mischief intended has been done. Let us rush back to Sita's side. *(They both rush back in great haste.)*

(Curtain drops)

SCENE 6.

(Scene same as Act II, Scene 1. Rama and Lakshmana come rushing on to the stage calling out Sita and not finding her on the stage Rama rushes into the hut and comes out quickly again)

RAMA: *(With disappointed face and anxious voice.)*
No, she is not inside the hut either.

(Both Rama and Lakshmana shout out her name in anxiety three or four times louder and receiving no answer)

RAMA: *(In an anxious voice.)* Sita, this is no time for pranks. Come out of your hiding. Do you not see that we are anxious about you? *(There is still no answer.)*

RAMA; She seems to be nowhere here. Let us seek her in her usual haunts. Lakshmana, you go to the river and see whether she has gone there for a bath. *(Both go out of the stage and Rama returns first.)*

RAMA : No, she is to be found in none of her favourite spots.

(Lakshmana also returns with a disappointed face and seeing him)

RAMA : Did you not find her at the river, Lakshmana ?

LAKSHMANA : No brother, there is no trace of her there.
(Rama breaks down and suddenly dropping to the ground and sobbing)

RAMA : Oh ! My worst fears have come true. She is gone. She is lost to me for ever I fear. The wily Rakshasas have beaten us this time. She has been either eaten up by them or abducted away. Oh ! Lakshmana, why ever did you disobey me and leave Sita alone ? *(Sobs.)* Nay, I cannot blame you, who have been fully faithful to us and had fully warned us of the Rakshasa treachery. What is to become of me now ? With Sita lost, with Sita gone out of my life, how can I continue to live on ? How can I go back to Ayodhya without her, and what answer shall I give to her father, Janaka and my mother, when they question me about my return without her ? Nay, I shall not go back. You go, Lakshmana, and tell them that both Sita and I have been destroyed by the Rakshasas and tell Bharatha that I have enjoined him to reign in my place and that he do strictly follow the foot-steps of our saintly forbears. I shall remain here and die. O Sita ! Sita !! Sita !!! *(Breaks down again and sobs vehemently. After sometime gazes blankly at a tree in front and cries out.)*

RAMA : Ah ! I see, you are hid behind that tree ! Come, come, I win. I have found you out. I can plainly see your sari jutting out. (*Rushes to the tree and not seeing her there.*) Ah ! you have fled to that other tree, have you ? I shall catch you there. (*Rama runs towards the next tree and not seeing her there, to another one with the same remark. After repeating this some three or four times, he addresses a tree*)

RAMA : You champaka tree, was not Sita hid behind you just now ? No ? Then tell me where she is. You do not speak ? I shall ask that mango tree. You mango tree, will will you not tell me where Sita is ? You will not speak either. (*Turning to another tree.*) Now, you Ashoka, Sita's favourite, you must have witnessed everything. Please tell me what has happened to Sita and where she is. You are silent too ! Well, I shall ask the birds. Ye koil, whom she has taught to sing, Ye chakravakas, who aspire to look like her breasts, ye parrots, ye peacocks, ye crows, will none of you tell me where Sita is ? No, you would not speak either ? Ye hills, ye dales. ye mountain streams, please do tell me where Sita is. No, not one of them seems to be prepared to tell me where she is. Ah ! Ye ungrateful wretches, who have been so fondly tended by her, ye are in league and are unwilling to disclose the truth. I very much suspect you have all conspired and destroyed her yourselves. If you persist in refusing to tell me where she is or what has happened to her, I shall with this arrow destroy you all, nay, destroy the whole world too. (*Takes out his bow and*

putting an arrow into it has drawn the string. Lakshmana, who was looking on with great concern goes to Rama and holding his hand brings him to the hut and seating him on the pial.)

LAKSHMANA : What behaviour is this Rama ? You, a man of great knowledge and strong mind, should you thus lose your mental balance and act like a mad man ? Fie upon you. Is this how you can find Sita ? I am certain that though she has vanished she would yet have left many clues behind. Get calm and become yourself. We shall look for those clues and trace out Sita.

RAMA : You are right, Lakshmana, but my mind was unhinged. I shall rest for a while and then we shall start the search. The hill-sides round about contain many a cave and cavern and perhaps Sita scenting danger has sought refuge in one of them. We shall search them exhaustively one and all. *(Sits quiet for a while. Lakshmana, who is closely searching the ground spies a string of flowers fallen on the ground, hurriedly goes there and picks it up.)*

LAKSHMANA : Here is what seems to be a clue—a string of flowers with a strand or two of hair. It has been evidently snatched away by force from the hair it was worn in.

RAMA ; *(Looking up and going to Lakshmana takes the flowers and examines them.)* These flowers are the ones I plucked this morning and gave Sita,

which she strung together and wore in her hair. These strands of hair are also hers. Which villianous brute has torn them out of her head. I shall scalp him when he is found.

LAKSHMANA: (*Searching for other clues.*) Look, here are more clues. Some heavy and broad foot-steps followed by what looks like the mark of small feet being resistingly dragged along. Ah! here are traces of wheels and impressions of donkey's hoofs. She must have been placed in a chariot and carried away.

RAMA: (*Looking at them.*) Come, come, Lakshmana. We have distinct clues now. Let us follow this track. (*They both hurriedly go out.*)

(*Curtain drops*)

SCENE 7.

(*The same part of the forest where Jataya and Ravana had fought. Rama and Lakshmana appear following the trail of the chariot wheels. A low groan is coming from near a thicket.*)

RAMA: (*Anxiously.*) Oh! here are some blood stains. Did the wretch kill Sita here and eat her up? Have we lost her then?

LAKSHMANA: (*Looking ahead.*) Broken parts of a chariot lie strewn about there-its ornamental pennants, its broken yoke and detached wheels; and yonder lie dead donkeys and the body of a dead Rakshasa. There are signs of struggle too.

I suppose two rival Rakshasas, who abducted Sita have fought for her possession and the successful one killing the other has carried her away.

RAMA: I hear some one groaning. Let us find out who it is. (*They both proceed towards the thicket from which the groan is coming.*)

RAMA: (*Going in front sees Jatayu by the side of the thicket lying on its back with its feet up.*) Lakshmana, there is a huge bird there lying on its back and its talons and beak are red with blood. It may be, this bird of prey has eaten Sita. I shall kill that creature.

(*Rama rushes towards it with drawn sword, but Lakshmana who had joined him by then and who also having seen the bird had rushed towards it.*)

LAKSHMANA: Rama, this looks like Jatayu, our father's friend who befriended us too and helped us in the forest many a time. He seems to be mortally wounded. Put down your sword.

JATAYU: (*Hearing the name of Rama, in a feeble voice.*) Do I hear Rama's name and is he here now?

LAKSHMANA: Yes, Rama is here.

JATAYU: (*Intervening.*) Thank God, he is come ere my last breath is out. I can now give him the news. Rama, your wife has been carried away by Ravana.

BOTH : So Ravana has carried her away ! How do you know it, Jatayu ? Please tell us all that you know about it.

JATAYU : Bend down please and listen. My life is fast ebbing away. I could not speak loud. (*Both bend down close to Jatayu.*) Listen, while I was sitting here on a tree, half dozing, I heard the sound of a woman's wail coming from the direction of your Ashram. On peering out, I saw a chariot coming this way in which was seated a Rakshasa and in his arms was struggling a woman to free herself. The chariot was fast approaching this place, and I went and stood in its way to arrest its progress and free the woman. I found this woman was Sita, your wife, and the Rakshasa, Ravana the king of Lanka. I stopped the chariot and bade Ravana to release Sita. He scoffed at it and a fight ensued in which, though I broke the chariot and killed the driver and the donkeys drawing it, being old and feeble I was myself overcome by Ravana and could not prevent his carrying away Sita. Mortally wounded by him I dragged myself here hoping that you might return before I died and I could inform you of Sita's fate.

RAMA : Jatayu, staunch friend of our family, I am highly grateful to you for your attempt to rescue Sita risking your own life in such an unequal combat. Though you could not succeed in freeing Sita your information is valuable. Can you please let us further know where Ravana took her ?

JATAYU: Alas! that I cannot; for, seeing his vehicle destroyed Ravana took Sita in his own arms and jumping into the air flew away with her in what direction I could not observe.

RAMA: I am greatly beholden to you, Jatayu, for what you have done. Please tell me what I can do for you.

JATAYU: You can do nothing now. I shall be dead in a moment, and all that I ask of you is to collect some faggots, place my dead body on them and cremate me. (*Saying this, Jatayu breathed his last. Rama and Lakshmana in tears go to collect faggots.*)

(*Curtain drops*)

PART. II.

ACT. I.

SCENE 1.

(*The shore of the Pampa Lake. Excepting in the front and on the left side, it is bordered with hills covered with forest. On the right at the back is a rocky hill. In the front is a clearing, covered with green grass, with some trees standing there on. On the right side, on the rocky hill are seated Sugriva, Hanuman and three other vanaras. Sugriva turns to the right and suddenly becomes alert, and pointing in that direction.:-*)

SUGRIVA: Saw you those two youths coming majestically towards us? Their bearing, their looks and their gait proclaim them as warriors and they are fearfully armed. I am afraid they are coming hitherward to kill us. Finding in all my wanderings

no spot on Earth, where I could feel secure from my brother Vali's wrath, I had believed I had found a sanctuary in this Matanga Ashram, since under a strong curse it was not open to Vali to enter it. But evidently he intends not to leave me in peace. Unable himself to enter this place, he has sent these warriors to kill me and my faithful followers. Let us flee from here before they come, and seek safety in some other place of hiding. (*Makes as if to run away.*)

HANUMAN: Lord Sugriva, you are living too much in fear of your brother and get easily panicked. I believe Vali's intention is not to destroy you altogether, but to keep you in sufficient dread of him that you dare not molest him; and having succeeded in that he will not pursue you further.

SUGRIVA: You are not aware of the ways of kings. They know it is folly to keep alive a possible rival to the throne, a potential danger to them, and they take every care to destroy him for ever. Why should these two be coming towards us so fully armed if not to kill me? They look so powerful too.

HANUMAN: (*Looking again in that direction.*) They look doughty warriors no doubt, but they seem to be coming with no warlike intentions. There is no cheer in their faces and they are laboriously dragging themselves along. It looks to me that they are themselves in distress. If they are in trouble as we are, it may well be worth our while to woo them into

an alliance. You know, fellows in distress make good friends and to ally ourselves with such powerful men would greatly advance our cause. So instead of running away from here in alarm, I think it is wiser to reconnoitre and find out whether they mean to harm us and if not, try to gain them to our side.

SUGRIVA: Hanuman, you are the cleverest amongst us all and your counsels have always been of great value. So, you are the fittest to go on this mission. Meanwhile, as a measure of caution, we shall keep ourselves in hiding in yonder cave. You please go to them and find out who they are and what their purpose is in coming here. If they are likely to become our friends, you may bring them over to us. (*Fxeunt all.*)

(*Rama and Lakshmana enter from the left looking very much tired and dejected.*)

LAKSHMANA: Brother, we have arrived at the Pampa Lake. We had some adventures on the way, and escaped a horrible death. We had been caught in the lengthy arms of that ugly monster, Kabandha who under a curse had acquired a hideous form with his head, eyes and mouth on his belly. With no legs and rooted to a spot he could live only by catching his prey from afar with his tentacle-like arms. Without our noticing the monster, those arms crept towards us and coiled us round. As we were being drawn towards its mouth to be devoured, we with great presence of mind cut off

with our swords those arms that held us. This act of ours freed Kabandha of his curse and recognising us as his deliverers he requested us to burn his hideous body. On our doing so he assumed his original beautiful form and learning the purpose of our journey, he in gratitude directed us to Sugriva living on the Rushya Muka Peak on the shores of Pampa Lake, who he thought might be able to help us in the search of Sita and her recovery. Next we entered the Matanga Ashram, where the pious old lady Shabari, instructed by her masters, the venerable Rishis, at the time of their ascending to Heaven, to await our arrival at the ashram, met and entertained us with great devotion and showed us the many wonders of the ashram. We have now reached the Pampa Lake

RAMA: Yes, this seems to be Pampa Lake. We have travelled long and far, let us sit on this green sward and rest a while (*Looking around after a short pause.*) Spring is come clothing the world with garments new and all nature throbbing with renewed life looks fresh and merry. The trees and shrubs clad in robes of green, purple and gold are full of bloom and the earth is carpeted with green swards the fallen flowers weaving coloured patterns on them. The bees droning their drunken songs reela long as they flirt from flower to flower getting drunk more and more. The air thrills with the love songs of birds, and the beasts are running after their mates And Lakshmana, look at the placid waters of the Pampa Lake mirroring the border hills, forest clad.

The water-fowl gently floating on them make no noise nor create any furrows as they gracefully glide over them. The unruffled water looks fully still like a sheet of glass and the profound silence is unbroken except for the splashes made by an occasional fish as it rises out of the water to dive into it again after swift and short flights. The gentle breeze rustling through the pointed leaves of the forest trees make soft music and skimming over the quiet waters of the Pampa Lake absorbs its moisture and blowing through the flowered boughs gathers their scent and coming to us yields, as to a welcome guest, its acquisitions-its music, its coolth its scent. But do you think all these things give me any pleasure? Nay, while the whole world is so bright and gay outside, my heart within is all gloomy and dark. In the days gone by, while Sita was by my side we rejoiced in such surroundings and ourselves sported to our hearts' content. But now, without her, they cause me keenest pangs and bringing sweet remembrances of those pleasant times double the misery separation has caused. The chakravaka birds wooing their partners in amorous notes and the proud peacock dancing before its mate dressed in dazzling feathers seem to mock me, mateless. I am sure, if Sita is still living, and if it is spring there also where she lives she must be feeling similarly. No, Lakshmana, I can endure this separation no longer. We have searched long and close but have found not Sita. I despair of ever meeting her again. What use is life to me

without her ? You return to Ayodhya. I shall linger here until death finds me, which I hope will be soon.

LAKSHMANA : Why this despondancy again, which kills efforts? What fresh cause have you for despair? On the otherhand we have received encouraging help all along in our quest for Sita and the probabilities are that we shall soon find her. Yonder hill might be the Rushya Muka Peak where Kabandha told us Sugriva lived. The latter, he said, having travelled all the world in seeking a refuge for himself from his brother's wrath might know where Sita is hid. Kabandha also advised us to befriend him as he might be of help to us in finding and recovering her. Let us proceed there.

RAMA : (*Composed and getting up*) You are right, Lakshmana, things have been more favourable to us than otherwise. We seem to be well on Sita's track. But these fits of diffidence born of separation pangs come upon me unawares of late, clouding reason. Bear with me when they are on. Now, let us move on.

(*Just then Hanuman appears dressed like a mendicant Brahman.*)

RAMA : Lo ! Here is a Brahman. Let us ask him our directions. (*Addressing Hanuman.*) Can you tell us, Sir, where Sugriva, brother of Vali, the vanara king, lives and direct us to him ?

HANUMAN : That, sure I can. But before I do so, please me know who you are and why you seek

Sugriva. Whether on a friendly mission or to harm him.

LAKSHMANA: Noble Brahman, we two are brothers, both princes of Ayodhya. Rama, the elder is the heir to Ayodhya's throne, but under the behest of his father, now dead, he, his wife Sita and I came to the forest. While living at Panchavati, Ravana, the Rakshasa king entered our Ashram, when we two were absent and carrying Sita away has hid her somewhere. While searching for her, we were told that Sugriva, a world wanderer, might be knowing where Sita is hid, and were directed to him. We were further told that he himself being in need of help we might supply him that help and get his in return to recover Sita. Thus, we have more reason to befriend Sugriva and not to injure him. Can you please now direct us to him?

HANUMAN: Noble princes. I shall most happily bring him and his comrades to you at once. In fact, I am Hanuman, a trusted counsellor of his. We spied you coming afar and fearing that you might be Vali's emissaries, sent by him to kill Sugriva, the others went into hiding deputing me to meet you and find out the truth. What you have told me has heartened me much. You look to be great heroes and Sugriva, who is looking for friends like you, would welcome you heartily. (*Jumps into the air.*)

LAKSHMANA: Look Rama, fate seems to be working in our favour. He, whom we wanted to meet and

whose friendship we were asked to gain is coming here himself and is said to be eager to seek our friendship.

RAMA: Yes, this is a good augury. Things look encouraging. (*At this point, Sugriva followed by Hanuman and three other vanara leaders jumps on to the stage.*)

SUGRIVA: (*Bowing to them.*) Mighty princes, I welcome ye and bow to ye. Hanuman has told me, who you are and how you seek my friendship. This has been to me what a find of water in the desert is to a person dying of thirst. Of a truth, I am in greater need of your friendship than you may be of mine. Your reputation has preceded you and I consider myself most lucky that such powerful men should want to be my friends. Here, I offer you my hand of friendship and I beseech you to accept it. (*Stretches his open hand and Rama grasping it.*)

RAMA: Most willingly shall I take your proffered hand and to solemnise our eternal friendship I am prepared to swear it before the holy fire Lakshmana, collect some dry sticks and light a fire. (*Lakshmana does so.*)

RAMA AND SUGRIVA: (*Going round the fire with joined palms.*) Witness, oh, you Fire God, we pledge ourselves to be eternal friends identifying our interests and to strive with all our might and main to help each other under all circumstances at all times and in all places.

SUGRIVA: (*Highly pleased and sitting with Rama on one of the two big logs, which Hanuman had brought and placed there while Lakshmana and the others sit on the other.*) Rama, we are now sworn friends and as no distinction exists between true friends our interests are merged. Your wish will always be my command as I expect my needs will be your concern. I have been informed, why you have sought my friendship. Be assured, I shall help you in every way to recover your wife, Sita. By the way, I am reminded of an incident that took place sometime back. While we five were sitting on the hill top, basking ourselves in the sun and chatting, we saw passing over our head a Rakshasa carrying a woman in his arms and flying across the sky. The woman was struggling and perhaps saw us sitting on the ground. Evidently to leave some track of her, she threw down to us a few of the ornaments she wore tied in a piece of cloth torn from her sari. The Rakshasa bore her away swiftly and we could not see much of them. Possibly, it was Sita, your wife. We have preserved the jewels. You may inspect them and see, if you can identify them as Sita's. (*Turning to Hanuman.*) Bring the jewels. (*Hanuman goes and brings the jewels and gives the bundle to Rama.*)

RAMA; (*Opens the bundle eagerly and sorting out the jewels.*) They are Sita's indeed. Look at these bracelets, Lakshmana, this necklet and these anklets, are not they all Sita's?

LAKSHMANA ; Brother, I know the anklets are hers. I have often seen them round her ankles when I have daily prostrated before her feet, but I am not able to recognise the others, (*as I have not observed her deckings beyond the level of her feet.*)

RAMA : Yes, they are all hers. (*Then in anger.*) Sugriva, tell me quick, where that Rakshasa took Sita and who he is. I shall slay him at once. I shall cut him to pieces (*And again handling the jewels and reminded of Sita, breaks down and sobs.*) Oh Sita, dear wife, where are you now ? And what atrocities may you not have been suffering under ? Are you still living or has the Rakshasa eaten you up ? Can I ever see you again ? How can I live without you ? No, no, I cannot bear your separation. I shall give up my life. (*Sobs excessively.*)

SUGRIVA : Rama, my dear friend, why have you broken down thus ? I too have for years been separated from my wife and it has been very hard to bear. I have suppressed my grief. You are a better man than I and more knowing too. Why do you give in to grief this way ? Compose yourself. Though in all my wanderings I have not seen where Sita is I can find it out and bring her to you. But before I can do that you have to relieve me of my constant dread of Vali, king of Kishkinda, who has not only appropriated my wife, killed or imprisoned my adherents and driven me out of the kingdom but has also threatened me of my life. With these fears haunting me I have roamed about

the earth in search of some place where I could be secure but could find no spot where he could not reach me. In this mountain peak however, though so close to his Capital I have found a sanctuary, as under a curse Vali cannot enter the Ashram, where it is located. But that does not totally remove my fear of him. Though he cannot come here himself he can send his agents to kill me. This fear can only be removed by his death. Rama, could you, would you bring it about? By his death I can not only feel secure of my life, but becoming king in his place I can command the services of millions of vanaras and direct their services to your cause. The vanaras are ingenious in all modes of travel and there is no place on earth, that is inaccessible to them. It will not be difficult for them to find out, where Sita is.

RAMA : You have comforted me and I thank you for it. As for your fear of Vali, you may shed it now. I shall kill him with one arrow from my bow, and instal you as king of Kishkinda. But I am curious to know, how such a bitter enmity arose between you brothers.

SUGRIVA : Listen then. It was not always so. On the death of our father, Riksharajas, Vali, the elder, became king of Kishkinda. He looked on me with affection then and made me the crown-prince. He is very strong and powerful and could protect himself, his kingdom and his subjects from all enemies. While we were thus living in perfect safety and

amity, a feud arose between my brother and Mayavi, a powerful Rakshasa, eldest son of Dundubhi, in connection with some woman. One day when Vali was holding court, this Mayavi came to the city gates and in a terrific roar challenged Vali to fight. While that roar frightened us all, it enraged Vali and though we tried to restrain him, he, in great anger, rushed to the gates to fight Mayavi. To be of some help to my brother, I followed him too. When he came to the city gates, Mayavi, seeing my brother in such great rage, lost heart, grew pale and turning his back began to flee. Vali pursued him and I too ran behind. After a long pursuit in which Vali was gradually gaining on Mayavi the latter suddenly disappeared. On reaching the spot where he went out of sight, we found there was a big hole in the earth covered by long grass growing round it. Bidding me wait at the mouth of the pit till his return Vali entered the pit and disappeared. Days passed, and weeks and months too. Vali did not appear nor Mayavi. I did not know what had happened. Finally at last, I saw some blood and matter oozing out of the pit. I concluded that Vali had been killed and intending to confine Mayavi within, lest he came out to kill us all too, I rolled down a huge rock to the mouth of the pit and covered it. Then I returned to Kishkinda and told the court of what had happened. They all mourned the death of Vali and crowned me king. After sometime, while I was holding court one day, I was appalled to see Vali come into the council room with

fierce looks and red with rage. I instantly got out of the throne, fell at his feet, explained what had happened, sought his pardon for my hasty conclusion, expressed my pleasure at his being alive and invited him to reoccupy the throne. But he would not be appeased. He charged me with intentional treachery, killed or imprisoned all those that he thought were my partisans and appropriating my wife for himself, kicked me out, and threatened me with my life, if I should ever approach the precincts of his kingdom. I have since then been wandering as an outcast without any home or family. But for these four faithful adherents, who are uncomplainingly sharing my misfortune I am solitary too. Rama, it is from this state that you have to save me. I have heard that you are ever ready to protect those that seek your protection. Please extend it to me now.

RAMA : My friend, your story has touched my heart. Fear not. Your miseries will soon be ended. You have only to point out to me that immoral and unnatural brother of yours, and I shall immediately kill him and make you king of the vanaras. Go and challenge him for fight and when he is fighting you I will shoot him.

SUGRIVA : I am most beholden to you for these words ; but Rama, are you speaking with a knowledge of my brother's valour and strength ? Excuse me for doubting yours. I have heard of them, but you do not know how strong and powerful Vali is.

I would not risk a fight with him, unless I am sure that you are his match. For he would not leave me alive again if I should fight him. Before I venture to do so I wish to be convinced of your superior skill and strength. Pardon me, if I ask for proofs of it.

RAMA ; Tell me Sugriva what proofs you want.

SUGRIVA : (*Looking into the wings and pointing his finger.*) You see yon heap of bones lying in that Ashram like a huge mound ? That is the skeleton of the double horned Rakshasa, Dundhubi,. He was extremely strong and wanting to try that strength, invited all strong things, including mountains and seas to a fight with him, but every one declined directing him to another, stronger than himself, till atlast he was told to challenge Vali. Vali gladly took up the challenge. The combat that ensued was terrible to see, in which each fought with utmost zeal to get the better of the other. Each kicked and hit the other with great vehemence and the issue seemed to be in the balance. But gradually Vali gained on his rival and holding the Rakshasa by his legs and lifting him up Vali swirled him rapidly round and round till blood started oozing out of his ears and nose and finally dashing his body against the ground Vali killed him and flung his dead body a league away into the Matanga Ashram, where the skeleton is now lying. In so doing, a spray of blood that oozed out of the Rakshasa's body fell on Matanga Rishi, who was deep in meditation. The Rishi enraged at the pollution thus caused and easliy

finding out who did it, cursed Vali in anger that if he should come within a league of the Ashram he should be dead. It is thus that this area has been made safe for me from Vali. Now, if you could throw ~~that~~ that heap of bones to a distance as far, I can have some confidence in your strength.

RAMA : Sugriva, watch me do it. (*Rama goes into the wing and the others on the stage are looking in that direction.*)

HANUMAN : (*After watching for a short time.*) Oh ! splendid, with a gentle touch of the toe, as it were, Rama has kicked off the skeleton two leagues away.) (*Every one of the spectators smiles with satisfaction.*)

RAMA : (*Reappearing on the stage with a smile and addressing Sugriva.*) Sugriva, are you now satisfied?

SUGRIVA : It is indeed a great feat, but my doubt still lingers. When Vali threw the body, it was still fresh, full of flesh and blood and quite bulky. Now it is a mere skeleton strivelled up under several years of blazing Sun. I cannot say that your feat equals that of Vali.

RAMA : What other proof do you want then ?

SUGRIVA : (*after looking round a little.*) Ah ! here can be another test. (*Again pointing his finger in a slightly different direction.*) You see those seven Sala trees with huge girths all standing in a line?

Can you shoot an arrow right through them all? Vali has done that often enough.

(Rama takes out his bow, steps to the front, takes an arrow and planting it in the bow and taking aim stretches the string to its fullest capacity and then lets go and the arrow flies.)

HANUMAN: Hurrah! the arrow has not only pierced the seven stout trunks all through, but emerging out of the last tree and hitting the distant hill side, has dived deep into it too. *(Every one's face is suffused with a broad smile and Rama too, with a big smile, turns round to Sugriva and asks him)*

RAMA: Does this convince you Sugriva?

SUGRIVA: *(Highly pleased and falling down on the feet of Rama.)* Excuse me, Rama, for doubting your prowess. I am fully convinced that you are far superior to Vali, and I fear not now to challenge him, with you to back me. I shall go and call him for a fight. But there is one more thing that I have to caution you about Vali. When he fights, he always wears round his neck a golden necklet, a gift from his god-father, Indra. The charm of this necklet is, that when his enemy faces Vali with this necklet on, the enemy's strength gradually gets reduced and Vali's gets enhanced. So, you should not face him. Besides, if Vali sees you and knows that I have your support, he may not come to the fight at all.

RAMA: I shall guard against that. You bring Vali here to fight. We shall all stand hid inside that

thicket and when you two are fighting, I shall let go an arrow at Vali that will kill him at one stroke.

(Sugriva goes and the others hide themselves inside a thicket. After some interval Sugriva comes running back pursued by Vali roaring. He closely resembles his brother Sugriva.)

VALI: You dare to challenge me and when I come to meet you you run away, sneak and coward as you have always been.

SUGRIVA: *(Stopping and turning round.)* I did not run away from fear of you. I only ran to lead you to this clearance, away from the city, that we might fight undisturbed.

VALI: Oh, you have suddenly grown bold. Come then and fight. *(Both engage themselves in a hand-to-hand fight and are seen wrestling together in a close grip. After a short time during which Sugriva, who is looking round for help from Rama is thrown down, kicked and hit with fists by Vali, who after he thinks he has given Sugriva enough, lets him go and says with contempt.)*

VALI: I think, you have had enough for this time. I should have killed you, but for the promise I have given to my wife and yours who, unsuccessful in dissuading me from coming out to fight you pleaded for your life. I hope, you have had a sufficient lesson not to molest me again. Don't you think that you will be treated with such indulgence again. *(Kicks again and goes. Sugriva continues lying on the ground groaning. The others emerge from their hiding place and go to Sugriva, Rama leading.)*

SUGRIVA: *(Seeing^a Rama, in a hurt voice)* Is this the succour you promised me? If you did not either like

to kill Vali or help me really you might have told me plainly as much. I would have continued to live on as I did before. But, you swore eternal friendship for me, promised to make me king and giving proof of your ability to do so you urged me on to call Vali for a fight. What pleasure do you derive by thus deceiving me and worsening my position with my brother? I had been told that you clung to your words, come what may. Is this how you prove it? Oh! I am badly hurt. If that is any satisfaction to you have it in full.

RAMA: Sugriva, my friend. I am most sorry for what has happened. I have given you cause to think me perfidious and accuse me as you have. But the truth is otherwise. I had raised my bow to shoot, but you brothers turning round and round in close grip of each other looked so much alike, that I could not distinguish between the two and in fear of killing you by mistake I abstained from shooting. You know my arrows are fatal and never miss their mark. You go and challenge him again and this time, we shall have some distinguishing mark on you so that I may know, who is who and thus being sure, I can kill Vali and not you. Hanuman, weave a garland of red flowers and place it round Sugriva's neck. (*Hanuman does so.*)

SUGRIVA: (*Slowly getting up and shaking off the dust.*)

Is this true? Can I depend on your acting this time?

RAMA: You need not doubt it. (*Sugriva with the garland round his neck goes inside the screen and*

the others get into the thicket again. After a short time, Sugriva comes running back followed by Vali.)

VALI: Rash and foolish fellow, you have not learnt your lesson as yet? This time I shall not spare you your life.

(Both wrestle together again. As Vali is gaining again he is hit by an arrow and falls to the ground fatally wounded)

VALI: *(Groaning.)* Oh! Who is it that has hit me with an arrow while I was engaged in a combat with my brother? It has struck me deep in a vital part. I cannot live.

(Rama, holding his bow and followed by Lakshmana and the others, comes out of the thicket and advances towards Vali. Vali sees Rama, with his bow and is surprised and aghast.)

RAMA: It is I, Rama, that shot you.

VALI: *(Surprised and aghast.)* It is Rama, Dasaratha's son, reputed as just and mighty whom all the world proclaims as the most righteous who would never swerve from the path of rectitude, who while harsh towards all wrong-doers is always kind to the others and injures none, who knows the rules of honourable war and strictly observes them, is it this famous Rama, that has shot me from behind, hid in a thicket, while I was engaged in a fight with another? I now perceive whence Sugriva derived the temerity to challenge me to a fight. Indeed my wife Tara, trying to prevent me from coming out to fight had

warned me of this, but I, knowing that I had done no wrong to you and believing that you would injure no innocent person, ignored her warning and came out to fight. I did not know that all the virtues that have been attributed to you are mere sham, put on to hide a nature essentially wicked. They say, you are a great hero. Was it not very heroic of you to shoot me unseen from behind when I was engaged in battle with another? That is the rule of honourable warfare that you observe? And, if you did want to fight me, though I had given you no cause therefor, why did you not do it openly and facing me? The result would have been quite different then and it would not have been I that would be rolling on the ground mortally wounded, but you. How have you benefited by killing me, either materially or in reputation? If you sided Sugriva, in order to obtain his help to seek and recover your wife Sita, could I have not done the same for you? Why did you not ask me for it? I would have slain the Rakshasa who abducted her and brought you Sita in no time, wherever she might have been hid. Was it necessary to kill me for it, and thus unfairly too? Oh! Rama, the mighty, the just, the honourable, why did you descend to such a mean act and besmear your fair name, the fairest in all the world, with foul blot?

RAMA: (*Assuming some anger.*) Vali, hold your tongue. I have good reasons for having done what I have done and you are heaping abuses on me knowing not what you are speaking. You speak

like an injured man innocently harmed, while you have grossly sinned and have been justly punished therefor. Know that Bharata is the overlord of all this earth and his domains extend from sea to sea. His agents are roaming all over his realm enforcing his law by punishing the transgressors wherever they are found. You have been guilty of a most heinous crime in taking your brother's wife as your mistress, while he is still alive. Death is the penalty therefor and I have inflicted that penalty on you. Know also that according to our shastras the ruler that punishes not a detected crime and he that commits a crime and is punished not, both acquire sin. The criminal that is justly punished is cleansed thereafter and is acceptable to good society. You should be thankful to me that you have thus been purified and not rave against me, the agent of justice. Further, you have charged me with dishonourable conduct of war, shooting you when your back had been turned towards me and you were engaged in a fight with another. I was waging no war with you to observe rules of war. I am a kshatriya and it is lawful sport for kshatriyas to hunt animals, and while hunting it is lawful to employ all decoys to secure the prey, nets, ropes and traps and take the animal unawares. When the animal is running away from you how else could you shoot it excepting from behind. As a vanara, you are no better than an animal, though indeed with quite many human qualities, and in killing you from behind, I have transgressed no law of the game. And there is yet another reason for

what I have done. Sugriva is my sworn friend and so dear to me as my brother Lakshmana. His cause is mine too and working in his interest, I had to do this. So, stop your illconsidered vituperation and rejoice that you are cleansed of your sins. So cleansed you are acceptable to me too and I no more bear any ill-feeling towards you. You too will be dear to me hereafter.

VALI: (*Feeling contrite.*) Rama, my eyes have been opened and I am truly contrite, Please excuse me for the harsh words I spoke in ignorance of your greatness, universally recognised and universally respected. I am in considerable pain and my life is ebbing away. I am not sorry that I am dying, but I am worried about my young and only son Angada. He has been fondly brought up by me and tenderly too. He has known no hardship so far nor sorrow. I do not know what his fate will be hereafter. Sugriva will assume the kingship of Kishkinda and I am afraid he may not take kindly to him. I am also concerned about my wife Tara. Although she pleaded with me for a better relationship with Sugriva, she was, as was natural, a tacit partner of mine in my actions against him and now Sugriva may wreak vengeance both against her and my son. Rama, please bestow upon them as much affection as you do on Lakshmana and see that they are not treated ill. Angada, though young, is already a good warrior and I am sure, he will be of great service to you in any future war with the Rakshasas.

RAMA: Vali, grieve not for what has happened. It had to be. But as I have already assured you, I bear no further ill-will to you. You have to your credit many a valourous deed and sure they will take you to heaven. As for Angada's future, brought up as he has been in an excellent way I am sure that he will behave both towards me and Sugriva in such a manner that we could not but love him. I promise you that he shall be as dear to me as Lakshmana himself. Nor need you have any concern about Tara. You may die in peace.

VALI: Thank you Rama, for that assurance. I am feeling faint and cannot speak more. (*Faints away*)
 (*Tara, Vali's wife, accompanied by a few palace ladies and her son Angada, comes wailing and running, lays her head on Vali's stiff body and exhibits great grief. Several vanaras, male and female, hearing the news of Vali's death gather round and stand at a distance. All are in tears and some are sobbing.*)

TARA: (*Lamenting and exhibiting great grief.*) Oh! my dear husband, my sweet heart, has it come to this after all? Is our happy married life at an end? Is it right that you should desert me and leaving me lone go to heaven by yourself? What wrong did I commit that you should do so? Why do you lie on this hard stony ground. Get up, it befits not a sovereign like you to lie here thus. You will not oblige me? You will not listen to me? Then, you love me no longer as you used to do? How close you are hugging the earth? You never hugged me

so close in all our married life. Has the earth become dearer to you than I? Speak, husband, speak. have you grown so angry with me that you would not even speak to me? If I have become so hateful to you, why do you not speak at least to your dear son Angada? See, how he is lamenting. He was so dear to you that when he ran to you with the slightest trace of tears in his eyes, hurt in a game or denied some request, you at once took him on your lap and kissing his tears away and whispering sweet words into his ears fondled him until he smiled again. Now though he is crying his eyes out, you are lying unconcerned. And see how your subjects are all grieving around. The distress of your lowliest subject made you unhappy and you never sent him away without enquiring into the cause of it and redressing it; but now, the laments of all these people move you not. Oh! he speaks not, nor does he move. He is dead. The hero of a thousand fights in which no foe of his was sent back alive or unchastised is himself lying dead here now; not overcome in a fair fight, but hit by an arrow shot by an unseen person not fighting with him. Vali, I had heard that Sugriva had the support of Rama and tried to prevent you from entering this fray. But, you listened not to me and ignoring my warnings rushed to your death. (*Turning to Sugriva.*) Sugriva, your wish is now attained. You can hereafter have the kingdom and live happily with your wife Ruma in no more dread of Vali. But, what is to become

of me and my son Angada who had seen no grief so far (*Calling Angada.*) Come Angada, have a last look at your father. He is set upon a long and distant journey from where there is no return. He will be available to you no more. So, take a deep and long look at him. Oh! I cannot live without Vali. I shall lie where he lies and taking no food or drink, I shall give up my life. (*Drops her head on Vali's chest still crying and sobbing. The scene touches every one and they all break out in fresh tears and sobs. Rama, who has also been affected by the scene is trying to catch the eye of Tara in order to console her, but does not succeed, Meanwhile, Vali gains consciousness and slowly turns. Tara, immediately sits up with a pleasant astonishment. Vali on opening his eyes sees Sugriva standing by the side of Angada and calling him*)

VALI: (*Faintly.*) Sugriva, my boy, come here. I have greatly wronged you by taking your wife and by expelling you from the kingdom. Forgive and forget it all. Destiny perhaps never willed that we both should be happy at the same time. I had my share of it, and am now dying; it is your turn now. Take the kingdom and all the riches and fame I have built up. I have one request to seek of you. I entrust my young son Angada to your care. Please bear with any misbehavior he may be guilty of at times and treat him not ill. Though young in age, he is both clever and strong and I am sure he will stand you in good stead in any future wars you may have to fight with Rakshasas. And treat Tara also with respect. She, daughter of Sushena, is a most wise lady and a good counsellor. You would do well to

consult her at all difficult times. But above all, be faithful to Rama's friendship to you. He has done you great good and you have in turn promised to help him in the quest of Sita. Never neglect that promise and do your utmost to fulfil it. And now take this golden necklet given to me by my god-father Indra. You know its power, but it loses its charm by my wearing it at my death. You take it and wear it now. (*Takes the necklet from his neck and gives it to Sugriva, who receives it. Next calling Angada to his side.*) Angada, my darling boy, I am quitting the world now and I would like to give you a few parting words of advice. You were a fondling and you were being indulged in every way. The same cannot continue hereafter. You are henceforward your uncle Sugriva's ward. You should not behave with him as familiarly as you did with me. You should not only look upon him with respect, but also listen to his advice and obey him, whether what he says appears pleasant or unpleasant to you. You must take care not to mix with his enemies or yield to their sly attempts to turn you against him and lend yourself as an instrument for their intrigues. You should always be loyal to Sugriva and help to build up his prosperity. You are a prince and you should neither be too familiar with any nor too distant. Oh! I am too faint. Death is come! (*He closes his eyes and breathes his last.*)

(A great wall breaks out on all sides and remarks are heard to the effect:— "Now that Vali is dead, Kishkinda looks empty."— "The Sun of vanaras is

set and the whole kingdom is plunged in darkness.”—
 “Now that our mighty king is dead, who is to protect us hereafter.”—“When again can we get such a strong, wise and kind sovereign to rule over us?”—
 Tara’s grief, which had been slightly reduced, when he started talking, increases ten-fold and she rolls about on the ground crying loudly.)

TARA: (*Wailing.*) Oh! my sweetest, oh my darling, you have deserted us after all. How are you right in going away, leaving me alone, a widow? How have I offended you that you should not have had even a parting word with me? What more pleasure can I find on this earth bereft of you? A woman may have a score of children and hundreds of other relatives, but what is she without a husband? A widow’s life is dreary and desolate. Nor children, nor father, nor mother, nor brothers can give her any consolation. It is truly said that a wise father should never marry his daughter to a warrior. She could rarely escape widowhood. But what a warrior you were and what woman would not be proud to be your wife? This same place has witnessed a hundred great heroes slain by you and laid low here, and now on that very ground you are lying dead. In this same place, you have a hundred times vanquished Sugriva and now at last you are lying dead a victim to his revenge. You had a glorious life on earth and you will have a glorious one in heaven too. Though you are lying here dead in the dust, your heroic look has not deserted you. Your body soaked in blood, smeared with dirt, and

full of battle sores, yet shines with a kingly lustre. Angada, my boy, come and fall on your father's feet to receive his blessings as he is journeying away to heaven. (*Angada comes weeping, embraces his father's feet and lays his head on them, saying:-*)

ANGADA: Father, I prostrate on your feet. Please pronounce your benedictions on me.

TARA: Vali, how is it that you are not blessing your son, when he has prostrated to you? Oh! you are completely dead. My life's companion, my dear husband, take me away too. (*Laying her head on Vali's dead body. she goes on crying.*)

(Sugriva, who has been greatly affected by Tara's grief and has been silently weeping all the time cries out.)

SUGRIVA: What a big sinner am I? For the sake of a kingdom I have committed fratricide. Wishing myself to become a ruler, I have caused misery all round. Vali, when a hundred times he defeated me and could have killed me each time, spared me my life and let me go advising me not to molest him again. Nay, every time I was badly hurt and was groaning under the pain, he affectionately took me on his lap and with tears in his eyes dressed my wounds and seeing me recovered sent me with a parting advice, not to cross his path. But, how have I requited his kindness, his mercy to me? By causing his death not in any honest fight but by foul treachery. Why did ~~this~~ evil thought arise in me of gaining a crown? Was I not well enough roaming the

hills and woods of Rushya Mūka, eating its fruits and roots? What pleasure can kingship yield to me won at this cost? (*Going to Rama.*) Rama, greatest of men, you have fulfilled your promise of getting me the vanara kingdom and it is open to me to enjoy it. But, I do not want it now. I have got a repulsion for it. See, how Vali's widow and subjects are wailing all round. I doubt, whether young Angada, stuck with greatest grief will live at all. It is true that fretting under the insults he hurled at me, angry that I should have been driven away from the kingdom and living ever in dread of Vali, I desired his death. But, with his death all those feelings have changed. What person, excepting me, weighing judiciously the pleasures that kingship can bring and the merits and demerits of the steps to be taken to obtain it would descend to such a heinous act? What respect can I command from my subjects by becoming a king this way and what affection from my relations? Whatever good deeds I may have done before, their merit is swept away by this evil action. And what other evils will follow in its train:— the death of Tara and Angada, the frustration of vanara chieftains, the ruin of the kingdom and the vanara race and my endless repentance. I stand the author of all these evils. Kingship has now become abhorrent to me and I no longer desire it. I only long for death and I propose to end my life, by falling into a flaming fire which may burn away my sins. Please do not stand in the way of it. You need be under no apprehension that my death will mean

the abandonment of the search for Sita. These vanara chiefs will enthusiastically carry it out and they are quite capable of doing it. And, are you an ordinary man to have to depend on their aid so much? Please permit me to die. It is not fitting that a sinner like me, a destroyer of his own family, and a destroyer of his own race, should continue to live. (Meanwhile, Rama, who is waiting to console Tara and has been seeking to catch her eye asks Hanuman standing nearby to bring her to him. Hanuman and another vanara lifting her by her shoulders from Vali's body communicate Rama's wish and take her to him. Tara sees him for the first time, standing erect and calm, bow in hand and glorious to look at. Though her first intention was to bitterly accuse him, struck with his magnificence, she moderates her feelings and speaks with mixed respect and bitterness.)

TARA: Rama, the best, mightiest and most respectable of men, why did you call me to you? You need not apologise to me for the killing of my husband Vali. You are known to be the most righteous of men and so you could do no wrong. You could not have killed him without good reasons therefor. It may be that he did you no wrong. bore no enmity to you and was not fighting with you, but was he not Sugriva's enemy and Sugriva your staunchest friend? What is wrong in killing your friend's enemy, a friend from whom you expect valuable help—Sita's recovery? Perhaps, Vali could have rendered the

same service to you and with greater ease, but it happened you preferred Sugriva's help and perhaps for good reasons too. Was it not all important that you should get back Sita? What matters if, in the process I had to be widowed? That you are very mighty is proved by the single fact that with one arrow you could kill Vali, the invincible, whom hundreds of the most strong had opposed and been killed? What if you struck him from behind and hidden in the bush? That was perhaps necessary too, that your word to Sugriva to kill Vali with one arrow should not be belied. Are you not best known as one who is meticulous in keeping to his word? To have openly fought Vali that redoubtable warrior would perhaps have rendered the fulfilment of that promise doubtful; and it was essential that it should never fail. Thus, I see that you have done nothing wrong and there is nothing to apologise to me for. But, I have to remind you that your promise to Sugriva remains yet only half-fulfilled. You had vowed to kill Vali and to complete it you have to kill me too. For, do not the shastras say and you know too, that as his wife I am Vali's half? Kill me please, complete your promise and maintain your reputation as a man of his word. You need have no qualms that you are killing a woman. You are noted above all for uttering no idle words and though a woman, I am half of Vali. No sin can attach to you by your slaying me—a yet unkilld part of Vali. It would be both an act of merit and mercy and I would request it of you. By

slaying me, you would unite me with my lord in Heaven and what act could be of greater merit than uniting a separated wife with her husband? I am sure that Vali, now in Heaven, surrounded by most alluring Apsara women, would yet find no pleasure there without me and would be yearning for my company even as you are for Sita's. And I here could not be happy with Vali absent. It would be an act of mercy on your part to bring us two together again, by killing me. I beseech you, Rama, as the most generous, the most merciful to grant me this request of mine.

RAMA: Noble Lady, I can understand your bitterness against me and your words half praise, half accusing, arouse no anger in me. What has been done is done. This had to be. Know that we on this earth are all creatures of destiny, helplessly driven by it towards its determined end even like a rudderless ship driven by the winds and currents unable to stop or alter its course. Vali brought this upon himself by his evil deed and now cleansed of his sin by the punishment he has received, he has entered the Heaven he has won for himself and is enjoying its pleasures. This is no matter to grieve over. You have sufficiently mourned over him in accordance with the custom of the world and you should now overcome your grief and turn your thoughts towards discharging your responsibilities on earth, which are great and many. (*Turning to Sugriva.*) Sugriva, you had better attend to the future work to be done and not give way to the thoughtless sentiments you have given expression

to. The immediate thing to be attended to is Vali's funeral and the subsequent obsequies. Give him a right royal one. Get a golden palanquin and placing Vali's body in it parade it in the streets of the city before placing it on the funeral pyre. (*Next turning to Lakshmana.*) Soon after the obsequies are over, let Sugriva be crowned the king of Kishkinda and Angada installed Yuvaraj, (*Crown Prince*). Let Tara and Angada enjoy the same comforts and as fully as they did while Vali was king. After all this is completed report to me where in a sheltered cave in Prasravana hill I shall take my temporary abode. (*Turning to Sugriva again.*) Sugriva, the rainy season is approaching and no expedition can be taken out while it lasts. I shall allow you these wet months for pleasure and rest, but as soon as the rains cease you should attend to your part of the contract and take effective measures for the search of Sita. If you fail to do so or delay it, you shall have no mercy from me.

SUGRIVA : Your instructions shall be strictly followed, Lord Rama. (They all disperse. Rama goes towards Prasravanagiri and the others towards Kishkinda.)

Curtain falls.

ACT I.

SCENE 2.

(*Scene : Prashravana Peak. Rama and Lakshmana are together.*)

RAMA : Lakshmana, look at the ingrate Sugriva. He got out of me what he craved but his promise to me he has ignored to fulfil. I had allowed him all the wet months for indulging in pleasure and ease, but had enjoined that he should start Sita's search immediately after that. The rains have long ceased, the swollen streams have subsided and the sodden paths have dried and yet Sugriva has shown no signs of action or of even remembering his duty to me. I wanted you to go and remind him of it and to warn him severely that if he continues indifferent, his fate would not be other than what his brother's was. Did you do so ?

LAKSHMANA : Brother, I did, I was myself wrathful of his ignominious conduct and walked right into his palace spouting sparks of anger and intent to chastise him as he deserved. When I approached his inner chamber I heard loud sounds of gaiety and laughter coming from within, which clearly showed that Sugriva, though late in the day, was still engaged in revel with several ladies of the palace including Tara and Rama, his own wife. This infuriated me further but loathe to go in, when they were thus engaged, I halted at the door and in angriest tones chided Sugriva for his neglect of duty and gave him the warning you gave. Evidently that alarmed them all. The sound of gaiety ceased at once and I heard Sugriva, afraid to face me himself in my wrath, ask Tara to meet and appease me. Tara hastily came, negligently dressed coming straight from the orgy and pleaded that I may not be severe with Sugriva.

She explained how, deprived of all pleasure and comforts for years, it was but natural for him to abandon himself to them, when first he could taste them. She even quoted your example, how you pined for Sita, when deprived of her company even for a short time and how much more Sugriva should have been pining for women's company all these years. She prayed that this once we may indulge his weakness. She also said that though thus immersed in pleasure Sugriva had not entirely forgot his duty to you and that messengers had already been sent to his chieftains throughout his realm to assemble here soon to receive orders and instructions for the search of Sita, and they would again be ordered, on pain of death, to report themselves to him before the evening expired. He will be coming to you with the chiefs, as soon as they arrive. Thus appeased and assured, I have come to report it to you.

RAMA : It is good that he has taken it seriously now.
Let us await his arrival.

(Enter Sugriva with a few vanara chieftains and they all bow to Rama. Sugriva still in fear and folding his hands.)

SUGRIVA : Rama, most tolerant and forgiving, I crave your pardon for my dereliction. Please do not be angry with me. I admit, I have been guilty of delay, but I assure you I have never abandoned my duty to you. These chieftains of mine have arrived from all the corners of my kingdom and brought their

followers with them. I have divided them into four groups, each to explore a different direction, the East, the West, the North and the South. With the knowledge I have gained from my world wanderings, I have described to them the countries they have to go through, their mountains, the rivers and peoples and how to conduct the search. They are skilled in every mode of travel and can at will take different forms. No place can be inaccessible to them. They are all clever and capable, and fully obedient to me. I am sure, they will scour the world all over and find out Sita, wherever she may be hid. I have set a month's limit for them for completing the mission and have strictly warned them to report the result before that month is over. (*Then introducing the leaders of each group.*) This Vinata will lead his party to the East; this Sushena, Tara's father, will with his party go to the West; this Shatabali will take his followers to the North; and the fourth party led by Angada himself and supported by the veteran Jambuvantha and the incomparable Hanuman, will conduct their search in the South. If you have other or additional instructions to give them, please do so. They are, hereafter, more your servants than mine and will strictly carry out your orders. And this Hanuman of whose skill, valour, resourcefulness & loyalty, I have had full proofs before and who will, I believe, most likely be the one to succeed in this enterprise.

RAMA : I am satisfied Sugriva, with the arrangements you have made and ye, captains, proceed on your

missions and may success attend your endeavours. Hanuman, since your master rates your capabilities so high and sees in you the accomplisher of this mission, I entrust you with this signet ring of mine seeing which Sita will be convinced of your truly being my messenger.

(All depart after bowing to Rama and Sugriva.)

Curtain drops.

SCENE 3.

(The northern shore of the southern ocean. It is covered by a rocky plateau with a peak called Mahendra. Enter Angada, Jambuvanta, Tara, Nala, Gaja, Gavaksha, Hanuman and a few more vanara chiefs. They all notice the sea and come and stand on the plateau. Hanuman sits on a rock, a little apart from the others)

NALA : We have met with another barrier here. (*Pointing to the sea.*)

TARA : Our expedition has not gone on smooth since the start. Even when searching the impenetrable forests of Vindhya and every one of its many caves the time limit was passed. Tired and thirsty and dying for water, not a drop of which could be found anywhere, we spied some water-fowl emerging out of the mouth of a cavern. Believing that water could be found in the cave we entered it, but after going a short distance we were plunged in utter darkness. Unable to turn back or move on and closely

gripping one another by our hands we groped along until atlast we saw some light entering through the other mouth of the cave. Emerging out at the other end, we were bewildered to find ourselves in an enchanted plain most beauteous to look at. The trees shone with a golden lustre and their leaves, flowers and fruits looked golden too. Several pools were there filled with cool and clear water with water-fowls of gorgeous feathers floating over them. The trees were inhabited by birds of bright plumage, their sweet notes floating in the air. The plain was studded with many a pretty house and amidst them stood a magnificent mansion gorgeous to behold. Both pleased and surprised, we were standing in consternation, when we were invited inside by a holy looking woman who turned out to be its keeper, Swayamprabha by name. She fed us with plentiful fruits delicious both to the taste and sight, and explained how this enchanted building was constructed by Maya, the Rakshasa Engineer, for his mistress Hema an Apasara beauty, and how she kept the mansion for Hema who mostly lived in the celestial realms. Living here in comfort and pleasure for several days we lost all count of time, but suddenly waking up to the realities and wanting to pursue our forgotten mission, we tried to get back, but could find no way out. On explaining our plight to Swayamprabha, she bandaged our eyes and led us out. On coming out we realised, that the time limit given to us was long past and we had discovered no trace of Sita nor saw any likelihood of doing so.

To return to Kishkhinda under these circumstances meant certain death to us under the strict disciplinarian Sugriva. Rather than go back to confess our failure and get executed we preferred to remain there and commit Prayopavesha (*suicide by hunger*). While lying there frustrated talking among ourselves, Sampathi, the brother of Jatayu, learning from our conversation, that Jatayu had been killed by Ravana while the latter was carrying away Sita, was both inconsolably sad at his brother's death and furious at the one who caused it. Unable to fly with singed wings, he crawled on to us and learning further details from us and coming to know of our mission and our despair, he gave us a most welcome news that he had learnt from his son that Ravana had hid Sita in Lanka and directed us to this place. This revived our faded hopes and we hastened here with elated hearts to meet frustration here again. How to cross the hundred leagues of ocean that divide Lanka from us? Nay, success cannot be ours and we are only destined to die.

(*Some others also echo the sentiments.*) Yes, failure is our lot, we have no other alternative but to die.

ANGADA : My companions, this is not the time to lose heart. If we give way to despair, we shall be capable of no effort. I am sure, we can find some one amongst us who can cross to Lanka, find Sita, and come back. Please tell me one by one of your respective capacities.

GAJA : I can leap over ten leagues.

GAVAKSHA : I can jump twenty, but not more.

GAVAYA : I can go over thirty.

(And so on the others give higher and higher figures.)

JAMBHUVANTA : I could have in my younger days jumped any distance. I have now grown old and yet even now I can jump ninety leagues, but that serves no purpose.

ANGADA : I am confident I can jump all the hundred leagues and reach Lanka ; but I am afraid after I get there, I shall be too tired to get back. This gives us no solution and it looks as if, after all we have to give it up.

JAMBHUVANTA : I know of one who can easily accomplish it and more, but he is purposely keeping himself away. Perhaps he wants a little persuasion. That Hanuman, sitting there, is quite capable of greater deeds. I shall go and tackle him. *(Goes to Hanuman and says:-)* Hanuman, how is it that you are standing here apart, while the others are discussing the ways and means to cross the ocean and conduct the further search of Sita. No one there feels confident of crossing over and they are in despair. Why have you not offered yourself to take up the mission? I am aware, you are wholly capable of it and that nothing that you undertake will fail. They are all thinking of dying. Please lift them out of the slough of despondancy and fill cheer into their hearts by undertaking the mission. Remember

who your parents are, and what qualities you have inherited from them. You are the recipient of heavenly gifts too given at your birth. (*Hanuman walking to them and joining them with Jambhuvanta.*)

HANUMAN: Comrades, fear not. I have both the swift-ness and strength of Vayu, my god-father. I have the capacity not only to jump over to Lanka, search there and come back, but even to pluck Lanka from its site and carry it over here, with all its buildings, streets and inhabitants. This is only a labour of love to me for anything done in Rama's cause, brings the greatest pleasure and satisfaction to me, his willing slave. I shall, even as you will be watching, jump over and come back, my mission fulfilled. I feel something telling me that I shall succeed. (Everyone is rejoiced at this speech, thanks Hanuman and cheers him and blesses him with success and everyone feels elated. Hanuman walks to Mahendra Peak to take a jump)

Curtain drops.

Act II. Sc. 1.

(A range of hills thickly wooded. At the foot of the hills is a glimpse of a fringe of the sea. At the front, on the hill Hanuman is seen standing.)

HANUMAN: Jumping off the Mahendra mount and leaping over the hundred leagues of sea, I have now alighted here on the Trikuta Peak on the ocean's southern shore. My journey has not been without

adventure. First rose out of the sea the submerged Mainaka, the winged mountain, barring my way. I brushed it aside, shattering at my touch one of its peaks. The Mainaka, taking a beautiful human form, and standing on the mountain top and not offended at the damage I did to the peak, but wearing a smile, glad that my speed and strength were such that the impact could shatter its rocks, explained to me, how he raised himself out of the sea, not to obstruct, but to afford me a resting place in my long flight. He had been urged to do so by the sea, which felt that in gratitude to Rama's ancestors, to whom it owed its expansion, it should do some service to Rama's messenger going on an important errand. Mainaka said, he had another good reason of his own to offer me his aid. It was Vayu, my god-father, who had carried him and hid him in the sea while Indra in wrath was with his bolt cutting off the wings which all mountains had then. It was a vile person, he said, who returned no good for good. He invited me to rest on his slopes, partake of the fruits and roots that grew there, and refreshing myself, proceed on the rest of my journey. I thanked him for the invitation, expressed my regret for the damage I had rashly done in ignorance of his noble intentions, but explaining the urgency of my errand declined the hospitality and pushed on. Next stood in my way "Surasa.", the mother of Nagas, with mouth wide open, ordering me to enter it before I could proceed further. She had been set to do so by the celestials, who wanted to test my resourcefulness in overcoming obstructions. I pleaded urgency and promised

to enter her mouth when I had finished my work. But she insisted that I should do it then and there, and she would not let me go. I took the challenge and began to expand in size that her mouth may not hold me. But she correspondingly widened her mouth too so that I may easily be gobbled up. When it had been expanded to its utmost, I suddenly reduced myself to the size of a thumb and immediately entering her mouth emerged out again and triumphantly told her that I had accepted her challenge and won, and that I should no longer be hindered. She was pleased at the trick, as also the gods that had set her up, and cheering me, blessed me with success in my mission. Next to make up for lost time, I sped straight and swift even like an arrow flying from Rama's bow, but I felt my speed suddenly arrested, and looking round I could not see the reason why. Casting my eye below. I saw a large monster with mouth wide open, grabbing at my swift moving shadow. This I realised must be the shadow-catching monster that Sugriva had described to us. The monster looked up at me and pleased at my huge size, expressed that starved so long, it was glad to secure a prey so large. It had the power of drawing its victim to its mouth by catching the victim's shadow and that it may swallow me. I opened its mouth so wide that I could see its vitals inside. I suddenly reduced myself to a small size and swooping down into its mouth and entering its insides rapidly tore its vitals with my teeth and nails. The animal rolled dead and sank and I, emerging swiftly

out took to the sky again and flew with no further adventures. I have arrived here. (*Turning to the right and struck with wonder.*) Lo, there lies the city of Lanka, perched on the hill tops like an island floating in the sky, and there, according to Sampathi is Sita hid and it is there that I have to conduct my search for her. But, how to enter it? It looks so strongly fortified and so closely guarded that it seems impossible for any, even an insect, or the wind to enter it without the Rakshasas knowing it. Meseems it was easier to cross the sea than to enter this city. I cannot certainly go in my present shape. I would be easily seen and prevented from pursuing my quest. Nor would it do to go in the form of a Rakshasa for they could soon find out the disguise. It is best, I think, that I retain my monkey form but reduce my size to that of a cat and enter the city in dusk, when the Sun goes down. It is nearly sunset now. and I shall have to wait only for a short time longer. (*Looking at the city again.*) How grand the city looks even from here, its spires, its pinnacles, its lofty buildings reaching up to the sky. Planned built by Vishwakarma and, the celestial Engineer, for Kubera, the god of wealth, and wrested from him by Ravana, his brother, it looks like Amaravathi, the city of gods. (*The sun goes down.*)

HANUMAN : The Sun has gone down I shall make my entry now. (Proceeds rather stealthily towards Lanka. After going a short distance he is arrested by a furious voice commanding)

VOICE FROM INSIDE THE WINGS: (Stop, you monkey, where are you going? If you proceed a step further, you will be killed. A huge woman of fearful aspect comes into view entering the stage.)

HANUMAN: (*Looking at her, in a calm and gentle voice.*) Who are you, lady, who with such a fearful face and furious voice threatens me thus?

LANKINI: If you should know it, you impertinent monkey, I am Lankini, appointed guardian of the city by Ravana, its ruler. None can enter it without my permission. Now tell me, who you are, whence you came and whither you are going so stealthily.

HANUMAN: Good lady, struck with its beauty from this distance, I got curious to see the city from within and was going thither.

LANKINI: (*Angrily.*) Did I not tell you that no one can go in without my permission? Get back.

HANUMAN: Oh! I shall have a hasty view of its beautiful parks, and streets, its buildings and decorations and return without lingering there long.

LANKINI: You obstinate, impudent silly fool, did I not order you to go back. Go. (Slaps Hanuman on the face. Hanuman gets furious at it and clenching his left hand gives a staggering blow with the fist to Lankini, roaring "you woman, you dare hit me?") Lankini reels at the blow and falls down.)

LANKINI : (*Imploring in a meek voice.*) Oh ! spare me, I am at your mercy, kill me not. Tell me please who you really are. You could be no ordinary monkey that could knock me down with one blow. I have been endowed with great strength to guard this city and none had conquered me so far.

HANUMAN : None could hit me and live. I have spared you because you are a woman. Know me as Hanuman of immeasurable strength come here as Rama's messenger to look for Sita who is reported to have been hid inside Lanka.

LANKINI : My eyes are opened and I now clearly remember the past. Brahma told me that the moment I was overcome by a monkey was also the moment that marked the destruction of Lanka and the annihilation of Ravana and the Rakshasa race. That time is arrived. Go, Hanuman, enter the city and search for Sita unhindered. You will succeed. Brahma's words cannot be rendered false (*Hanuman goes.*)

Curtain drops.

Scene 2.

(Outskirts of Lanka. Hanuman standing on an eminence soliloquises in a sad tone.)

HANUMAN : Vain has been my flight to Lanka, vain all my efforts in crossing over here and vain my whole night's search. Unobserved, but keenly observing, I roamed all over the city and lingered where people

had gathered, listening to their talks. Some were engaged in banter making fun of one another, some talked politics and some religion. Military groups that I passed were narrating their exploits or were talking of coming battles, but no where did I hear of Sita or could learn of her. When the city went to rest I entered into every house, looked into every room and peered into every corner thereof. In some I found married couples making love to each other and in some, husbands listening to the music played by their wives. In some again I found lone maidens sadly thinking of their absent lords and some couples sporting on the moon-lit terrace; but no where could I find Sita or learn of her. In the midst of night, I penetrated into Ravana's palace itself, and wandered through its many corridors, halls and rooms I found in them many rare and valuable things but no trace of Sita. Therefrom I spied and entered the "Vimana", Ravana's Royal Chamber and was struck by its beauty and splendour. Its sculptured pillars depicting, men, beasts and birds and natural scenery, its painted walls and jewelled floor beggar all description. I saw therein women of surpassing beauty lying all round in various postures and various positions, evidently tired from the night's carousal of drink and dance. The garments of some had slipped off their bodies and their ornaments displaced. Some were hugging hard the instruments they were playing upon as though they were their lovers or their children. Some lay embracing and kissing one another, perhaps imagining in their drunken fancy or half-conscious sleep the other to

be Ravana, their lord. They were all deeply drunk, looked wholly tired, and were soundly sleeping. In their midst, I saw a big beautiful cot with chiselled legs of gold studded with precious stones and the canopy was hung with a rich silk cloth embroidered with gold. The mattress was thick and soft and was covered with milky white sheets of silk. Half-sunk in it and looking like an elephant immersed in a river of foam slumbered Ravana, appearing mighty even in his sleep, with his huge form and strong arms, broad chest and thick neck. On that sudden vision I was taken aback and involuntarily slunk behind a pillar, but the shock passing off, I approached him and could not but admire his figure and his imperial look. Oh ! if only he was not sinful what admirable monarch he would be ! By his side lay a most beautiful woman, far fairer than the hundred others lying around and more richly garbed and more brightly ornamented. Such beauty and grace could only belong to Sita and for a moment I thought it was she. I even rejoiced that I had found her, but the very next instant, I realised my folly. She was fast asleep and how could Sita get even a moment's sleep, parted from Rama and how could that virtuous lady lie beside another male ? Where then was she indeed ? I got despaired of finding her, but could not give up the search. I doubted it indeed. I looked closely into the face of every woman there. I stole into all the other rooms and searched. I found other things :— the half tasted plates and half drunk wine, and other persons but not her. I descended

into every cellar and climbed into every attic and terrace. I scoured every cave and cavern, every well and pond and every wood and park, leaving not a palm's width of Lanka unsearched, but I met with no better success. Could it be that Sita, being swiftly borne by Ravana over the sea, slipped and sank? Or could it be that, living amidst fierce Rakshasas and constantly threatened by them, the timid Sita died of terror? Or could it be that the cruel Rakshasas killed her and ate her up? Whatever it be, I have been unable to find Sita and am now in real despair. What, what shall I do next? What shall I tell Angada, the prince, Jambuvan, the veteran, and other trusting colleagues of mine when on my return to them they eagerly question me about the result of my mission? Should I, as I must, confess to them my failure, would they not turn round and say: "Well Hanuman, what is that which you have achieved more by your wonderful flight than we just sitting here on Mahendra peak? We had full confidence in you and had hoped that you would save us from Sugriva's wrath and his order of death to us, which would be our lot, should we return to him so late without succeeding in Sita's quest. But what is it that we have actually got from you? Now only death awaits us and you." Nay, the evil that ensues my return ends not there. Rama finding that he would never more meet his consort would surely not like to live, and if Rama dies, Lakshmana could not long survive. Both their brothers at Ayodhya would kill themselves too and how could their mothers with their sons no more, continue to live? With the

Royal house thus extinct, the people of Ayodhya could have protection, happiness or comfort no more and the kingdom will turn into a weeping desert. In Kishkinda too, our king Sugriva, when he finds Rama, his dear friend and benefactor, dead, would in sheer sorrow and gratitude lay down his life ; and Tara already grief-stricken with the loss of Vali, her first husband, would be inconsolable with the loss of her second too and die. And what next to say of Angada, the crown prince, deprived of both his father and mother ? There vanara subjects bereft of all protectors would, like the people of Ayodhya, find no more happiness in their lives and the mountain valleys and river banks would no more witness their frolics and gambols or echo with the sound of their mirth and laughter. Rather than start such a series of disaster by my return it is best for me to stay on here residing on the seashore subsisting on what alms I may get. Or shall I end my life by throwing myself into the sea and become food for its creatures ? (*After some pause and thought*) Nay, I should not thus despair. Despair kills all initiative and action and is the undoing of man, while hope inspires enthusiasm and impels him to endeavours fresh, which generally lead on to success. Sampathi told us Sita was hid in Lanka and Sampathi speaking from knowledge could not be wrong I shall not end my search. I shall search and search until I find her and may the gods Indra, Varuna, Surya, Vayu my own father, and the rest give me success this time. How shall I proceed ? (*Thinking and looking*

all round, he sights at a distance a clump of trees.)
 Oh yonder I spy a grove of trees. It looks like a well
 laid park That is a part of Lanka, I have not seen
 before. I think, I had better begin my new quest
 there

(Leaps in that direction from the eminence.)

(Curtain drops.)

ACT. II

SCENE 3

(A part of Ashoka Park. Under a huge Ashoka tree in the centre back of the stage is sitting Sita on bare ground wearing a soiled cloth. She is unornamented and her unbraided hair trails to the ground in one tangled tress. Her head is slightly bowed down and tears stream forth from her eyes and she is frequently sighing. Around her are seated a number of Rakshasis all ugly and uncouth holding weapons like spears, axes etc.,. Bordering the open space in which the group is sitting are several shrubs in a semicircle. Hanuman comes through a shrub at one side of the stage. He is facing the audience and has not yet observed the group under the tree.)

HANUMAN: *(Aside facing the audience.)* How exquisitely beautiful has the park been laid. Its shaded paths and convenient seats, its flowering shrubs and fruit laden trees, its low hills and rippling streams with artificial falls and rapids, its pools and ponds edged with slabs of marble and jade, its caves and caverns and its beautiful bowers and pavillions clearly reveal

the hand of Vishwakarma in fashioning it. How skilfully art is blended with nature in its formation. Melodious birds hidden among the leaves fill the air with sweet songs and others, brightly plumed, dash from tree to tree. This looks no inferior to the celestial garden of Nandanavana, fashioned by the same hands. A promenad here soothes and satisfies all one's senses. Sita, who revels in nature's beauties, if in Lanka and if alive, will surely come here on an evening to enjoy its sights and smell, and watch the animals, drinking out of the brooks. It may prove fruitful to watch for her here (Then he turns towards the group and sees them, himself however still hidden from their view, covered by the shrubs.) I see a group of women there. The one in the middle is in evident distress. Her head is bowed down and tears are pouring from her eyes soaking the ground. Sighs escape incessantly from her breast. Her hair is unkempt and falls to the ground in a single braid. She wears a costly cloth but it is much soiled and her face, hands and feet, are covered with dust. She looks gaunt and lean, indicating that she abstains from taking any food. How handsome she is though distressed, unornamented, unkempt and covered with dirt. She shines and shines not like a clouded moon. How ugly in contrast are the women around ! Some are short and stout, some long and lean, some are one eyed ; some one eared ; some have short wooly hair and some have no hair at all, others have their whole body covered with hair. All have thick lips,

protruding teeth, long and sharp nails, and rough and folded skins. What a collection of ungainly and uncouth figures! They all look like rakshasis and are armed with spears, axes and iron bars. Is the woman in the centre a prisoner in their hands? It looks like that. Is that beautiful woman Sita, here held captive by the rakshasis? (*Gazes at her again and thinks.*) On a more intent look I guess it is Sita. Her every feature, every look seems to accord with the description Rama gave of her and the short glimpse we had of her, when Ravana bearing her away passed over us while we were seated on the Rishyamuka Peak. Why, there hang by a twig the very ornaments listed to us by Rama as worn by Sita excepting those which she threw at us while being borne away. She could be none other than Sita. Oh! how fortunate I am that of all the millions of vanaras that were sent in search of her, I should be the one to find her. (*Looking at Sita again.*) I feel blest by looking at her divine beauty. What virtue, what magnificence and what benevolence seem to radiate from her. Is she not the fittest mate for Rama? What wonder that he should so much pine away in her absence and so much long for her presence? The wonder is that he should be able to hold on to life without her even for a short time.

What a vile crime Ravana committed in separating such a couple! How much Rama would rejoice at the news of my discovery of Sita! I shall go closer and watch events before I decide upon my further course of action. (Goes from behind the bushes to the

Ashoka tree and getting up the tree sits hidden among its leaves. Just then the day dawns and muffled sounds of drums, trumpets and music are heard from the direction of Ravana's palace to announce the dawn. Soon after, a procession of women from Ravana's harem headed by him enters the park and comes to the area covered by the Ashoka tree; Ravana is slightly reeling both on account of incompleting sleep and the lingering effects of the carousal of the previous night; and so are the ladies accompanying him. Two slave girls precede him holding torches in their hands burning perfumed oil. One is holding a white umbrella over Ravana. Another carries a gold cup and a gold flask of wine. Some are carrying rolled carpets, two others walking by his side are driving off flies and insects with gold handled whisks. Other ladies follow too and their garbs, evidently disturbed by the night's revel, are not fully adjusted yet. As soon as Sita sees Ravana and the approaching cavalcade, she starts and instinctively covers her bosom with her legs drawn close to her body and turns her face to a side. Ravana comes close to her smiling.

RAVANA: Fair lady, I was impatiently waiting for the day to dawn to come and feast my eyes on your loveliness, but even as I am coming you turn your face aside and cover your breasts to hide your beauty from me. Why are you afraid of me? I may be the lord of all the worlds but I am just your slave. With your beauty you have carried away my heart and are sporting with it mercilessly just as an eagle car-

rying away a serpent does. Relent lady, have pity on me and become, in fact as you have already been in my thoughts, the queen of my heart. Why do you mortify yourself thus, sitting on this stony ground, sleeping on bare earth, with only a tree for a roof, unkempt, unwashed and unbedecked, starving yourself to death and weeping the whole day long. This state fits you not at all. You were born for better things, to live in palaces and enjoy all the luxuries they provide. Even in your distress unornamented and dirt-smeared, you look so enamouring. How much more enchanting you would be well washed, well clothed, dazzling with ornaments, and your face suffused with smiles which sadness now covers. Nature never intended that you should waste yourself like this. Youth is fleeting and what is passed could never be recalled. So enjoy it while it lasts. Shake off this unreasonable sorrow and come and live with me as my wife.

SITA: King Ravana, it is not meet that you should speak thus to a married woman. Your praying for me is as vain as a sinner praying for heaven. A woman's brightest ornament is her chastity and her husband is her lord and God. Married to Rama, how can I become your wife? Born and bred up in a noble family and entering another as noble, how can I ever think of unfaithfulness to my husband? It is impossible that such a heinous thought could ever enter my mind. Ravana, cultivate the thoughts of righteous men and tread their holy path. As are your wives to you so are the wives of others to them.

Judge others by your own feelings. Divert your thoughts from me and fix your affections on your own beauteous wives.

RAVANA : Sita, since the day I set my eyes on you, I can find no pleasure in my wives. I have a thousand of them, picked from Devas, Gandharvas, Nagas and others and I shall discard them all for you and make them your slaves to attend on you and minister to your wants. I possess an unbounded kingdom, large riches won from my brother, the god of wealth, rare gems and jewels, charming garments, various vehicles and innumerable other things exquisite and costly. I shall lay them all at your feet. Nay, with my incomparable valour, which none dare oppose I shall win more kingdoms for you, acquire rarer gems and greater wealth and give them all to you. Be mine and enjoy all that wealth and give away whatever you wish to your father Janaka and other relations of yours. In your enjoying your life with me let your relations profit too and flourish. Come Sita, revel with me in parks on the sea sands and the woods with sweet sounds of trilling birds and humming bees flowing into your ears and the sweet scent of blooming flowers wafted to your nostrils. All the three worlds will bow to you Can you think of a better life? Can Rama give you all this ?

SITA : Ravana, why do you vainly pursue me thus ? The allurements that you hold out cannot tempt me from the path of virtue. Further more, as Rama's wife, I have all that you promise me and more.

RAVANA : Silly woman, how unwisely obstinate you are?

It is ever the way of women. As and as a man makes love to her, the more and more she pretends indifference and spurns him. As and as he likes to please her, the more and more, she makes him her slave. Know that I can this instant take you to bed by force, and by the rakshasa code of ethics there is nothing wrong in it. But compelled love yields no pleasure. Why do you hang on to Rama? What is it that Rama has brought you to? A foolish coward, who tricked by a calculating woman, tamely yielded his right to her without a protest, an aimless wanderer in the woods with no money poorly clad and precariously living sitting on the ground, eating wild roots and sleeping on bare earth, a beggar in fact. What can he give you? Indeed, he has dragged you to his own rugged path, exposing you to the rigours and dangers of a forest life. Is this the love that he has shown you and is this the love that you prefer to mine?

SITA : Rama may have chosen to be a beggar now, but be he a beggar or prince, as his pledged wife I share his lot with gladness. Having laid my head on his shoulders you think I could be tempted to lay it on another's pillow? What are you compared to him,—a jackal before a lion, a hare before an elephant.

RAVANA : What! How dare you speak to me thus? Are you ignorant or over-bold? Rama can be no equal to me either in tapas, strength, valour, wealth or fame. Pleased with my penance, Bramha has gifted me with invincibility. I command a huge army of Rakshasas

which no enemy horde can face. Indra and his celestial hosts flee before me and seek to hide themselves in nearby holes and crevices I have conquered all the three worlds and no Asura, Naga, Gandharva or any other army dare oppose me. Even the elements fear me. The wind ceases to blow, the streams cease to flow, the Sun ceases to shine and the mountains begin to quake at my anger. Who is so mighty or wealthy as I in all the three worlds and what is Rama a mere man compared to me?

SITA : You boast of your might, your army, your valour and your conquests ; and yet, you sneaked into Rama's Ashram, when he and his mighty brother were away and brought me here by stealth. Is that your bravery ? Even the thought of their approach had scared you and how much would have their presence ? If they had found you at your vile deed, there would have been no more Ravana on earth. And you speak of your army. What became of the fourteen thousand rakshasas under your doughty brother fighting Rama alone ? Nay, Rama is too mighty for you. It is not safe for you to incur his hostility. But he is also noted for his kindness, for his protection of those that surrender to him, however much they may have injured him. If you have a desire to live, present me back to him and seek his pardon. Though you have done a most grievous wrong to him, he will pardon you and let you live. Else, you will soon see arrows bearing marks of Rama and Lakshmana darkening the skies of Lanka and then, neither your tapas nor no power on Earth

or Heaven can save you. You with all your kith and kin and the whole rakshasa race will perish and Lanka will become desolate.

RAVANA : Impudent woman, for every offending word you have now uttered decrying me you deserve death and I should have killed you before now were it not that my inordinate love for you stays my hand. Sita, I want you intensely. I, Ravana the proud, the greatest beseech you, be mine.

SITA : (*Angrily.*) Thou leecherous rakshasa, what sinful person in all the three worlds, excepting thee would persistently persecute a married woman with illegal love? I wonder that my evil eyes that look so lasciviously at me have not dropped to the ground torn out of their sockets, that thy vile tongue that uttered such lewd things about me has not shrivelled up. I feel that with the power of my own chastity I can burn thee; but I do not want to take off from Rama's hands the punishment that he should himself inflict on thee. I wonder, there is not one in Lanka that could counsel thee to abandon sin and follow virtue, or if there be any such, I doubt whether his advice would have any effect upon thee. Even flourishing countries that come under the sway of kings, whose minds are not properly trained, who are not guided by good advice and who indulge in sinful deeds come to decay and ruin. I am afraid such will be the fate of Lanka under thee. I believe it is destiny, that intending thine own end, the end of the rakshasa race, and the end of this kingdom,

has led thee to this act and allowed thee to succeed thus far. Else, how could it have been possible for thee to abduct a queen of the famous Ikshvaku house and bring her here? Thou art surely working out thine own destruction. Perish, if thou so wilt. With thy death, the Devas and the inhabitants of all three worlds will rejoice and breathe in peace.

RAVANA : (*In a tempestuous rage.*) Thy insolence has passed all bounds. My patience is exhausted and I shall kill thee now. (*Rushes towards her with drawn sword.* Mandodari, his queen, who with other women of Ravana's herem was listening to Sita's conversation with approbation and along with them was encouraging her with facial signs, quickly intervenes and arresting Ravana's raised hand.)

MANDODARI : My lord, why care you for Sita, an unwilling woman, who appreciates not your greatness. You derive no pleasure by consort with a woman that does not reciprocate your love or adore you. You have a thousand wives among the rakshasas and the celestials who are eager to get into your arms and I am always ready to give you pleasure. You leave Sita alone and have your pleasure with us, your willing wives. Come, let us revel together. (*Tries to drag him away.*)

RAVANA : (*Lowering his arm.*) Sita, I forbear once more. At thy request I allowed thee a year's time during which to learn to love me. Two months of it are yet left. Know that if before they expire thou wilt

not come and share my bed, my cooks shall prepare thee for my morning meal. (*Next turning to the rakshasi guards*) Ye, rakshasis, I charge ye that either by persausion, inducements, threats or even force, ye bring this woman to yield to my desires. (*Turning to Mandodari.*) Come dear, let us go. (Exit Ravana and his wives. Rakshasi guards flock round Sita, who is wailing.)

1ST RAKSHASI GUARD: Ravana, descended from Paulastya, is the greatest in that dynasty, and he offers you his love. Why do you not accept it? Take my advice and do so,

2ND RAKSHASI: How is it, you silly woman, that you choose not to be the wife of the king of rakshasas and the conqueror of the celestials?

3RD RAKSHASI: Ravana's harem is filled with a thousand women, all handsome and all beautifully adorned. Leaving them all, and Mandodari too, his most loving and adorable wife, he seeks your love and you spurn it. Could one be more foolish?

1ST RAKSHASI: He, that in many a war has conquered the Devas, Gandharvas and Danavas, comes supplicating to you for love and you, a lowly creature, deign to disdain him. What foolish behaviour is this?

2ND RAKSHASI: Living in Ravana's harem, you could have every comfort and every pleasure; good food, excellent wine, soft beds, attractive apparel, splen-

did ornaments and every thing else you may desire and how is it that they do not attract you ?

3RD RAKSHASI : Sita, being human, do you think you can be the wife of only a human being ? Nay that is wrong. Why do you hang on to Rama ? It is doubtful whether he is still living, and if he is, there is no hope of your seeing him any more. Forget him, a poor ascetic, and marry Ravana, the wealthiest in all the three worlds and enjoy his wealth along with him to the fullest extent you please.

SITA : Plague me not. What you have all been telling me so long is sinful and condemned by all the world. I can never never do that you ask me to. I cannot think of it. He whom I have wed, be he poor or turned out of his kingdom is my lord and worthy of my veneration. I cannot think of any existence apart from him. (Hearing this the rakshasis rush towards Sita with upraised weapons and threatening.)

RAKSHASIS : So, you will not accept Ravana as your husband ?

1ST RAKSHASI GUARD : Sita, enough of this display of constancy to Rama. Anything carried to excess ends in grief. We have been sufficiently impressed by your show of devotion to your human husband, but now, change it all and listen to my advice, which is to your advantage. Henceforth cherish Ravana as your lord, the lord of all rakshasas, all conquering, handsome like Indra, the most liberal, the most self-sacrificing and the most beloved of all. Discarding

Rama accept Ravana as your lover and smeared with sweet scents and dazzlingly adorned you can reign supreme as the queen of all the worlds. Why, yet cling to that impoverished Rama? If still you will not take this advice, we shall all together eat you up.

2ND RAKSHASI: (Roaring with anger and threatening Sita with her fist.) Kind and patient, we have borne the unpleasant words that you have uttered so far. Listen now to the advice I give you, beneficial to you and suited to the circumstances. Brought from over the seas which cannot be crossed, you have now entered Ravana's house and are closely guarded by us. It is impossible even for Purandhara to rescue you from here. Stop weeping, cast off this long suffered sadness, get cheerful and disport with Ravana to your heart's content. You know, Sita, how short youth is for women Before you lose it enjoy it to the utmost. In company with Ravana roam over wooded hills and in pleasant parks. Seven thousand women will always be ready to serve you If you refuse to listen to this advice, we will pluck your heart out of your body and eat it.

3RD RAKSHASI GUARD: Oh! I am very much tempted to feed on this woman's entrails, her heart, her liver and her breasts. Let us tear them out and eat them.

4TH RAKSHASI GUARD: Let us throttle her and kill her and then report to Ravana that she died. He would surely permit us to feed on her. Let us then divide

her among ourselves in equal shares and feast on her. Some one go and get some drinks and sauce to go with her meat.

1ST RAKSHASI GUARD : This proposal is quite agreeable to me.

OTHER RAKSHASI GUARDS : And to us too.

(Sita gets up and tottering along to the Ashoka tree and leaning against its trunk speaks to herself.)

SITA : I am sunk in deepest grief at my separation from Rama and the cruel rakshasis teasing me with their sinful suggestions are adding to my distress. Let them eat me up if they will. Let them cut me to pieces or throw me into a blazing fire. I shall not do what they say. How can I bring my mind to love the detestable Ravana whom I loathe even to touch with my left foot? On! What use is life to me without Rama the noble, Rama the virtuous, Rama the valiant, Rama the beloved of all? I do not know, what misfortune haunts me still that Rama, who killed Viradha, the mighty rakshasa that teased me in Dandaka forest and slew thousands of rakshasas in Janasthan has not come here yet to free me? The deep sea that surrounds Lanka, impassable for others, could surely be no obstacle to Rama or his valiant brother Lakshmana? What then might be the cause? Perhaps they are not aware of my being confined here and there is none to inform them of it. Poor Jatayu, the king of eagles who could have told them of my abduction has also been slain by Ravana. The noble bird that came to rescue me, itself

met with death on my account. The brothers may not even know that I am alive, or may it be that they are themselves dead? The wily rakshasas adept in cunning and bursting with hate for the chastisement they have received at their hands might have done away with them in some underhand way; or Rama, pining with grief at separation from me might have put an end to himself and entered the other world. Blessed are the people of the other world, who may be seeing him now. How I wish to join him there! Or may it be that Rama, completing his period of exile and returning to Ayodhya and being crowned king has found other loves and forgotten me? While presence keeps love alive, it fades in absence until finally effaced. Nay, Rama is not of that kind, nor could Rama the intelligent fall a victim to the rakshasa's wiles. If Rama and his brother should only come to know that I am kept here a prisoner under Ravana's control, they would come in no time and filling Lanka with their arrows release me, and rid the world of Ravana and the rakshasas. Lanka would then be resounding with the lamentations of rakshasa women bemoaning the death of their husbands, brothers, and sons and the bereaved city itself would look like a widowed woman. But the time limit, which Ravana has imposed for my acceding to his wishes is fast approaching. That evil fiend cannot discern between right and wrong and would nothesitate to do the most heinous thing. I wish not to live until then. Should any on supply me with poison now, I would gladly take it

and die. But I see no one here to oblige me that away. My heart must be made of stone that, bereft of Rama and plunged in interminable grief, life still persists in me. How true is the adage that death doth not come to one at one's desire! (*Rakshasis rush towards her with upraised spears saying :-*)

RAKSHASIS (ALL): You woman who persists in you folly, we are going to kill you now and eat you up.

SITA : These demons leave me in no peace. I shall end my life by hanging myself to this Ashoka tree with my hair (She loosens her tress and tries to catch a branch of the tree.)

TRIJATA : (Who was napping wakes up just then and hearing the Rakshasis' threat): Ye Rakshasis, eat me up if you like, -not Sita, Janaka's daughter and Dasaratha's daughter-in-law. The dream from which I just woke up betokens ruin to the Rakshasas and victory to Raghava. (The Rakshasis step back and flocking round Trijata, ask of her in curiosity and fear.)

RAKSHASIS ALL: Trijata, what is the dream you saw? Relate it to us at length

TRIJATA : I saw Rama and Lakshmana, white-robed and garlanded, seated in an ivory palanquin floating in the sky swan-borne. I again saw them mounted on an elephant approaching Sita, who, dressed in a most beautiful garb and richly ornamented, was standing on a mountain peak rising out of the sea and I saw

Rama lifting her on to the elephant and seating her on his lap. I next saw all the three flying towards the north sitting in the Pushpaka Vimana. On the other hand, I saw Ravana, his son Indrajit and his brother Kumbhakarna, dressed in red or black and riding on an ass, camel and crocodile respectively, falling from their mounts and drinking oil and liquor and dancing and shouting like mad men enter a black pit filled with mire and unclean things and sink into it. I saw Vibhishana, however, regally clad, riding on an elephant with a white umbrella held over his head. I saw the beautiful city of Lanka burnt and ruined, its numerous elephants and horses all killed and its inhabitants dismayed and mad rushing into the sea and drowning themselves. All these clearly indicate victory to Rama and ruin to Ravana and his race. So cease teasing Sita. Rama will not tolerate it and will kill you all. Seek her pardon and request her to intercede with Rama on your behalf. They are both kind and will forgive you and protect you. (Meanwhile Sita, who has walked to the trunk of the Asoka tree and has caught hold of a branch with the idea of hanging herself, loosens her hair and winds it round her neck saying :-)

SITA: Rama, I sustained my life so long with the hope of being reunited with you. But that chance seems remote and I do not know if it could come within the next two months. Meanwhile Ravana and these rakshasis are molesting me. I cannot stand them; I shall end my life by hanging. (Then suddenly turns towards the audience with a smile and says :-) How

is it that I feel a sudden glee? I also see auspicious signs around. My left eye-lid flaps like a lotus leaf struck by a fish's fin and my left shoulder and left thigh shake of their own accord. Birds emerging out of their nests are perched on the highest boughs singing merry tunes. All these are said by experienced persons to indicate coming happiness. Something good is going to happen to me. (Hanuman, who hidden among the leaves of the Ashoka tree has witnessed the scene all along and heard the conversations peeps out and says to himself)

HANUMAN: That this is Sita is now confirmed. She is found and my main errand has ended. Also in roaming about Lanka I have learnt of its defences and the rakshasa strength I could very well go back now and report to Rama and Sugriva all that I have seen. Yet, I feel my mission is not complete unless I meet Sita and speak to her. Rama besides questioning me how Sita was and how she felt, would surely ask me what she said. What can I tell him without speaking to her? Further great harm may result in my going away without seeing Sita and comforting her. Separated from Rama and believing that the prospect of a reunion with him is remote, isolated from all friends and relations and surrounded only by enemies and constantly threatened and harassed by them she seems to be in a desperate mood and contemplating suicide. What use will all our efforts be if on my report Rama and Sugriva should come over here with the Vanara army to release Sita and find her dead? Nay, it is imperative that before I leave here I should

meet and comfort her and tell her of our plans. But how to disclose myself to her is the question and how to speak to her in the presence of these rakshasis. The latter may not present much difficulty. They all appear drowsy keeping watch all night and look like going off to sleep. I may wait for that opportunity and use it. But the real difficulty is in appearing before Sita, without scaring her and convincing her that I am come from a friendly source. Tricked many a time by cunning rakshasas who can put on any disguise and living in the midst of the enemy camp into which no friend of hers can penetrate, she might suspect me too as an enemy or verily Ravana himself in disguise and cry out in terror. Then the rakshasis would wake up and seeing me, bring soldiers to capture me. Of course I could kill them all; but my plans would be upset and I may be so weakened in the fight that I may not be able to cross back over the sea. (Just then the rakshasis who had flocked round Trijata to listen to her dreams are overcome by sleep and lie down Hanuman notices it.) The guards have fallen asleep. This is the moment for me to act. How shall I proceed? (*After a little thought*) I think I had better sing Rama's glory and that of his ancestors. It would please and soothe her and might prepare her mind for credence. (*Aloud.*) There was a king called Dasaratha of the noble Ikshvaku race who ruled over Ayodhya. He was great as a king, famous as a warrior and holy as a saint whose brave and good deeds are sung all the world over. He has a son named Rama whose equal the world has never seen nor could ever see.

Beautiful in appearance, strong of arms he is well skilled in all the arts and all the sciences. In warfare and the use of arms he has no compeer. He is most brave, most kind and generous and he knows not to utter an untruth or swerve from the path of righteousness. His respect for his father's promises led him to resign his throne and go into the woods, which he entered along with his brother Lakshmana, second only to him in all virtues and accomplishments, and his spouse Sita, a marvel of a wife.

SITA : Hark ! Who sings my husband's glory and that of the Raghava race ? Listening to it I get exhilarated and my gloom has partly vanished. (*Looks round but sees nob dy.*) I see none round about here who could have sung it. Alas ! It may only be a dream or the hallucination of a distressed mind. Thinking constantly of Rama and wishing always to hear of him, my thoughts and wish might have taken form and deceived me thus. Nay, this cannot be an hallucination. Hallucination springs out of a half-conscious mind, but my mind is fully alert and I can feel and perceive material things around. Nor could it be a dream. Dream comes only in sleep and which person so oppressed with grief as I can gain even a moment's sleep. But who could have sung this in a place so hostile to Rama and to which no friend of his could have any access ? (Then looks up and sees Hanuman on the tree and is alarmed.) I see an ape up there. It is said to be a bad omen to see a monkey in a dream. I trust that my husband has come to no harm nor any of my relations. God protect them all. I

forgot, I am not asleep and could not be dreaming. If it is real then how could this ape have come here? Could it be Ravana himself come in this disguise to deceive me again singing Rama's praises? (Hanuman knowing that Sita has seen him is coming down to her to present himself before her and as he is coming lower, and lower, Sita is withdrawing backwards farther and farther from the tree trunk thinking it is Ravana)

SITA : (*Aloud, as she is withdrawing*) Ravana, you once appeared as a Sanyasi and deceived me and you are now come as an ape to cheat me again. I am already oppressed with heavy grief. Is it proper that you should further harass me? Is it right that you should thus persecute a lone helpless woman sorely troubled? (Hanuman has come down and standing at a distance and reverentially bowing to Sita.)

HANUMAN : Madam, I assure you I am not he that you think me to be. Rama's messenger I am, Hanuman, a vanara come here under orders of Sugriva, the vanara king whose friend and benefactor Rama is.

SITA : I am inclined to believe you for the fear is gone and in its place I am feeling a spontaneous joy at seeing you. But, how could any friendship arise between a human and a vanara. Please explain me that.

HANUMAN : You are aware of the episode of the golden deer. Rama and Lakshmana returning to the Ashram after killing the deer, found you vanished. Wandering all over in search of you they came across

Kabandha and were counselled by him to befriend Sugriva who might help them in your search and recovery. Sugriva was then living as a refugee on mount Rushyamuka with me and three other ministers, in dread of his brother Vali, the king of Kishkinda. So directed by Kabandha, Rama and Lakshmana came thither and met Sugriva. A pact of friendship was sworn to by them under which Rama was to get Sugriva the vanara throne and the latter was to help Rama in finding out his wife and recovering her. Accordingly Rama killed Vali with one arrow and installed Sugriva as king in his place. Sugriva in return sent thousands of his subjects in four groups to search for you in the four directions. I came with the group sent South. Leaving the others of my party on the Northern-shore of the ocean, I leaped over the waters and arrived here. After a long and anxious search I have been fortunate in discovering you here, but I am very much grieved to find you so much harassed. Believe me that every thing I have said is true and as a further proof of my authenticity I present you this signet ring of Rama given me by him to me to prove my identity. Hands over a (ring. Sita takes it eagerly, reverently presses it to her eyes and puts it on her finger.)

SITA : Hanuman, I recognise the ring. It always adorned my husband's finger and seeing it and touching it I feel as if I were seeing him and touching him. With no more hesitation I accept you as his messenger. I am hungering to hear of him. Now please tell

me how he is and his brother Lakshmana and how are his brothers at Ayodhya and my mothers-in-law. Does Rama think of me and care for me still? Is he keen on liberating me and have me back? How is it he has not come so long and when does he mean to come? I am sunk here in endless sorrow and see not when relief comes. I am always thinking of him and it is only that and a faint hope of a reunion with him that is keeping me still alive.

HANUMAN: Madam, Rama and Lakshmana are both well and so is Sugriva. Rama has sent you his love and the other two their respects. But, Rama, plunged in sorrow no less deep than yours, at separation from you, eats not except the wild roots and fruits nor sleeps. Ever thinking of you with your name always on his tongue he is apathetic to external feelings. Indeed, he feels not the insects and worms crawling up his body and does not shake them off. He frequently starts up in his uneasy sleep calling out your name. When he sees anything pleasing he remembers you and sighs that you are not by his side to enjoy the sight along with him. He is only looking forward to the time when he can join you again.

SITA: I am both pleased and sad at what you say—pleased that Rama should be so much thinking of me and sad that he must be suffering so much on my account. But, if he is so keen on joining me again how is it that he has not come here yet to liberate me? He that did not tolerate Viradha touching me, and killed with ease such a mighty monster, how

does he tolerate my being brought here by Ravana and kept his prisoner to be made love to? It should be mere sport for Rama to invade Lanka, slay Ravana and his tribe and take me back. Why is he delaying? I am afraid I am being pursued by some misfortune, the result of a past sin, that I am still left suffering here.

HANUMAN: Madam, I swear to you by all that is precious to a vanara, that Rama is eager to free you and finds no peace till he does so. But unfortunately he knew not where you were and directed all his efforts to conduct a search for you. Now that I have luckily found you I shall go and report it to him and you will soon see him here at the head of a large army of vanaras together with Lakshmana and Sugriva and laying the city to ruin he will release you from this profound sorrow and be joined to you.

SITA: Hanuman, you are so optimistic and for a time you made me so too. But, how could this large army cross the deep and wide sea and how could Rama and Lakshmana come over here? I believe there are only three persons in all the world who could do it-yourself, Garuda the eagle, and Vayu the wind. There are only two months left of the year during which Ravana promised to abstain from using force to have me, but I do not propose to live beyond a month from hence if I am not released till then. How can I be saved in such a short time?

HANUMAN: Worry not Madam, you seem to think that I am the only vanara that can leap over this width

of sea. Sugriva has under him thousands of such as I and they have the power to travel in every manner and nothing can obstruct them. They are all equal or superior to me and none inferior. You know that it is not the best that is sent as a scout but only an ordinary one and I have come here as a scout only. Have no misgiving about it-millions of them will be coming here soon filling Lanka with their shouts and deeds and carrying Rama and Lakshmana on their shoulders. The expeditionary army is ready poised and the only interval necessary is the time required for me to fly back and the army to cross over here.

Be of good cheer. But, if you are so urgent about it I can suggest a way by which your sorrow can be immediately brought to an end. You sit on my shoulder and even while you are looking at the Sun and Moon I can carry you over and alight on Prash-ravana Mount where Rama is sojourning

SITA: What a silly suggestion, Hanuman, that you should cross the sea carrying me! In the first place how could you, so small, take me on your shoulder? And even if you could, is there not every chance that being borne along so swift over the waters and gazing at the sea I would feel giddy and slip down into it? Thirdly when you are taking me away you are sure to be pursued by rakshasas fully armed. How could you at the same time both hold me and fight the pursuers and that too unarmed? While you are engaged in the fight is it not quite likely that losing my hold I should tumble down into the sea and drown? And if you are vanquished and killed what

is to become of me? There are other objections too to which I attach greater importance. How could I as a modest and virtuous wife allow myself to be closely held by any other male than my husband? If I did so when Ravana brought me here it was because that I had no option then. Lastly, it is Rama's due that he should himself liberate me and retrieve his honour by openly slaying the villain that sullied it.

HANUMAN: (*A little shamefaced.*) Madam, regarding my ability to carry you on my shoulders, I am sorry you are not acquainted with my powers. But I admit that with regard to the other objections that you have put forward, my proposal was hasty and not well thought of. I specially appreciate the fourth one. What woman except you could have thought of that? Pardon me, I made the suggestion only with the idea of providing an immediate relief for you and with no other motives. Now, I shall go back to Rama and hurry him hither. But before I depart, lady, can't you tell me of some incidents in the past by relating which I can convince Rama that I have actually met you and spoken to you?

SITA: Yes, do hurry back Hanuman. And for the incidents, I can tell you of two hitherto known only to Rama and myself. Once when the upper corner of my sari had slipped away and I was readjusting it a crow came and pecked at my breast. While I was trying to drive it away Rama saw me and smiled. I too smiled and hung down my head in shyness. After a struggle with the insistent crow and

somewhat tired from it I came to Rama and lay down on his lap to rest. After a time I got up and he in turn laid his head on my lap and went to sleep. The crow seeing this opportunity came and attacked me again. Drive it away, as I could, it returned again and again and pecked at my breast. I could not use all my force lest I should disturb Rama. It created a sore in my breast from which blood began to flow. When the blood moistened Rama's cheek he woke up, saw the sore and surprised and angry, he looked round to know who it was that had caused it. Finding the crow which was still there with its bill red with blood and a piece of flesh in its beak he readily made out that it was the culprit and drawing a straw from the mat on which we were sitting and chanting some incantations he threw it at the crow. The straw immediately burst into a flame and pursued the crow. The crow got greatly alarmed and flew swiftly away chased by the blazing straw. However swift the crow flew and in whatever direction, the straw closely followed it. Wandering everywhere and refused protection by every one and still pursued by the fearfully flaming straw it came at last to Rama and falling at his feet sought his protection. The all-forgiving Rama took pity and pardoned it, but he said to the crow that as the incantation cannot go in vain the crow might offer its right eye to the straw which it did. Thus deprived of one eye but saved of its life the crow thanked Rama and flew away singing his praises. You may remind Rama of this. Again while we were frolicking near Chitrakuta on the

Mandakini's banks the vermillion mark on my forehead had been effaced. Rama noticing it took some red-ochre from the ground and grinding it on a rock applied a dot of it on my forehead. You may remind him of that too.

HANUMAN : Thank you lady. I shall relate them to Rama, but can't you give me a material token too, some jewel that you have worn and which he may recognise ?

SITA : I shall give you one. (Removes from the twing the small bundle of ornaments that was hung on it and opening it takes out a jewel worn in the hair and gives it to Hanuman.) This chudamani, a head ornament, was given to me at my marriage. Seeing it, Rama will be reminded of three persons, myself, my father and his own father. Take it and give it to him.

HANUMAN : (Hanuman takes the jewel, reverently presses it to his eyes and carefully wears it on a finger.) Madam, I shall go now. I shall relate to Rama all that I have seen here and all that I have heard and I shall tell him all that you have said too. Be of good cheer. I shall return soon with my masters, Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva and the expeditionary force. Know that the end of your troubles is not distant. Please give me leave to go and bless me.

SITA : (*With tears in her eyes.*) Hanuman, you gave me considerable relief in my distress by coming as an

agent of Rama and in your company, though short it has been, and conversing with you, I had forgotten much of my trouble. Now that you are going away and I am losing the solitary comforter I had gained and have to be in the midst of adversaries again, my heart feels heavy. Cannot you extend your stay here by one more day, by keeping yourself hid in some thick bush or tree? It may give you too some rest and enable you to cross the sea easily.

HANUMAN: Kind and venerable mother, I am greatly touched by your solicitude for me and invitation to stay here another day. I would very much wish it too, but time is short and I must hurry back that the army might come here soon.

SITA: Yes, do return. Forget not to tell Rama every thing that I have told you and specially impress on him that if he delays in coming and I am not released in another month, he cannot find me alive. Go, God bless you. (Hanuman, reverently bows to Sita and takes his departure from her.)

(Curtain drops.)

ACT II

Scene 4

(Another part of Ashoka vana. Enter Hanuman.)

HANUMAN: I have seen Sita and spoken to her. I have also seen a lot of Lanka and its strength that may be of future value to us. Is there anything left for me to do here before I leave? A clever messenger

does not stop with doing what he has been commissioned to, but also does all other things which not inconsistent with the main object but supplementary to it can advance his master's cause. Is there any such thing I can do now? (*After some thought.*) Yes, I must leave some impression that can give Ravana an indication as to what he has to contend against, some idea as to the strength of his adversaries and also do some notable damage to the proud rakshasas. Incidentally I may create for myself an opportunity to confront him and find out his real intentions and his real strength. This Ashoka Park, beautiful like Nandanavana, must be very dear to him. I shall destroy it. He will get into a rage and send armed people to punish me. I can then exhibit my strength and it may lead to other developments too.

(He goes, the curtain drops and crackling sounds of broken branches, thuds of fallen trees, the chattering of frightened birds and the cries and shouting of alarmed guards are heard coming from behind the screen.)

Shouts from inside the wing: Run, run, branches are being broken, trees are uprooted, that big fearful ape is destroying the whole park and could not be stopped. The keeper has been killed. It is threatening us. Run for safety. The whole park is devastated excepting the part where Sita is. Run and inform king Ravana.

ACT II

Scene 5

(Ravana's Court Hall. Ravana is sitting on the

throne fanned by slave girls on either side. Other slave girls carry wine flagons and jewelled cups and a white silk umbrella is held over his head. His ministers and courtiers are sitting on chairs arranged in rows on either side of the throne. Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana, Ravana's brothers, are also among them.)

RAVANA : (Addressing the courtiers.) This could be no mere ape. Its deeds betray that it must be an agent of some enemy of mine that has been conquered by me, sent here by him to molest and damage me - perhaps by Indra himself. It is reported to have laid waste my beautiful park killing the guards and keepers thereof and to have destroyed our exquisite temple. When, enraged at that, I sent the Kinkaras to chastise it, it seems to have killed them all with ease. Next went Jambumali, the son of my minister Prahasta, to punish it and though a clever and redoubtable warrior he also met with death at the monkey's hands. The seven sons of the other ministers, who went next also met with the same fate. Next I had to send my five famous generals. They were no match either for the ape and were all killed. Then my son Aksha, noted for his bravery and skill in battle, met the ape. For long, he is said to have fought cleverly and well, but finally the ape is reported to have caught him by the legs and whirling him round bumped him against the ground and killed him. Thus my dear son too had to give up his life. What ordinary ape could have been able to cause all this havoc ? Now my son Indrajit has gone to capture it. Of course, Indrajit is an expert in all the strategies of war and a brave fighter. He

knows delusive warfare too and can use at appropriate times, the charmed missiles. In every one of the many battles that he has fought against Devas and Asuras he has been a victor and is invincible. Yet I had to preach him caution in fighting the monkey. I do trust that he will vanquish it. *(A great noise is heard coming from behind the scene of huge crowds shouting triumphantly "Hai Indrajit, the conqueror, death to the monkey that has done so much damage". Then an orderly enters the scene and bowing to Ravana)*

ORDERLY: Good news, your Majesty. Prince Indrajit has captured the monkey and is bringing it here. All the citizens of Lanka are following it with cries of joy.

RAVANA: I expected it and I am most pleased to hear it. *(Just then Indrajit enters with a proud gait followed by Hanuman bound with strong ropes and dragged by several rakshasas bearing arms. Indrajit bows to Ravana)*

INDRAJIT: Father, I have brought you this monkey captive.

RAVANA: Brave son. I expected it of you. *(Turning to his minister Prahasta.)* Prahasta, enquire of this ape fully, who he is. Why he has come here and whence and why he destroyed the Ashoka Park. *(Meanwhile, Hanuman has been gazing on Ravana since he was brought into his presence and struck by his grace and grandeur exclaims to himself admiringly.)*

HANUMAN: (*To himself*) What a figure! What strength! What wealth and what Majesty! What an imperial bearing he has and what lustre seems to radiate from his body! If only he were not so sinful he would have been fully fit to rule over the celestial empire, to be Indra's overlord. But he is most cruel, most heartless and does most heinous things. The Suras, the Asuras and the three world are greatly afraid of him and long for his destruction.

PRAHASTA: (*Addressing Hanuman.*) You monkey, be not afraid and tell us the full truth. Who are you? Who has sent you here and with what purpose? Is it Indra or Kubera or has Vishnu sent you here with the desire of conquering Lanka? Or if you have come of your own accord, how did you manage to come to this capital of Ravana? What was your object in devastating his beautiful Park? You have the appearance and body of a monkey, but your deeds are most wonderful and much beyond the capacity of a mere monkey. If you tell the truth, you will be liberated, or else killed.

HANUMAN: (*Boldly addressing Ravana*) Ravana, I shall answer you direct. I have not been sent by Indira, nor Vishnu, nor Yama and Kubera I do not know at all. I am a vanara, not by disguise but in fact. I am come here under the orders of the vanara Chief Sugriva as his messenger. As a friend and cousin of yours he has sent you a few words of advice through me. Listen to them. You are a great person and well read. You fully know what is right and what is wrong. Further you have practiced severe Tapas and earned great

knowledge and power thereby. You rule over a mighty empire. As such you should do no wrong. You have here confined the virtuous wife of another person, forcibly brought. There is nothing more heinous than such a crime. Such an act will drag down all your prosperity and lead you to utter ruin. The woman you have brought here is the wife of no less a person than Sri Rama. You need not deny the fact. I have found her here a prisoner under you. You do not know the might of Rama. No person, be he a god, could hope to live having done him a serious wrong. You may falsely be under a sense of security having obtained a boon of indestructability from Brahma. Under that boon you can meet with death neither from a rakshasa nor Deva nor any beast or bird, but in your arrogance or foolishness, you neglected to seek immunity from a man or vanara and Rama is a man and Sugriva, my lord, a vanara. Do not suppose either your good deeds, of which I admit there are many, will protect you from the evil effects of your bad ones. The effects of good and bad deeds are independant of one another and cannot cancel themselves. Your good deeds have brought good fortune to you and your evil ones will surely bring their own punishments. If you are wise and desire not destruction, hand back Sita to Rama and seek his pardon. If you do not, Rama and Sugriva will come here soon together with Lakshmana and the vanara army, lay your empire to ruin and take back Sita. You feel triumphant that you have been able to carry away Sita, a beautiful woman with whom you can consort. But know that what you have brought is not a lovely woman but your ruin under that form. Follow Sugriva's advice.

Present her back to Rama and preserve your life and your empire. And now, I shall tell you why I destroyed the Ashoka Vana and why I killed all the rakshasas that you sent against me. I had to meet you to give you this message and finding no other means of access to you I started damaging the park knowing that you would be sending persons to fetch me to you. But they tried to kill me and in self defence I had to kill them all.

RAVANA: (In a great rage.) Kill this impudent monkey at once.

VIBHISHANA: (Standing up at once.) Brother, excuse me. Control your anger. You have ordered the death of a messenger. You are well versed in state-craft and are fully aware of the cannons recognised by monarchs, under which no agent of another monarch can be ordered to be put to death. It is but right that a messenger should truthfully give out the message sent through him. If it offends you, you should punish the one that sent it and not the one that brought it. If your order of death of this messenger is carried out, you will be universally condemned and a great stigma will attach to your reputation as a king; There are other punishments prescribed for an offending messenger—disfigurement, whipping, shaving his head smooth and branding. It will be quite lawful for you to order any of them. Further you can gain nothing by killing him. If you kill him, there is none that can convey back your reply to the real offender, who it is that deserves your wrath. If, on the other hand you let him go and Rama and Sugriva

come here, as he says, you will have the opportunity to fully vent your anger on them.

RAVANA: (*After some thought*) You are right, Vibhishana. I admit it is not proper that I should order the death of a messenger. But I cannot let go this monkey wholly unpunished. He has destroyed my favourite garden with our revered temple, killed my dear son Aksha and done a lot of damage. I shall get him disfigured. A monkey is greatly proud of its tail and considers it as the most ornamental part of its body. Its loss is felt by it as wholly disgraceful (*Turning to Prahasta*) Prahasta, get this monkey's tail wrapped with cloth dipped in oil and setting fire to it, let the monkey be paraded in all the principal streets of the city and then let it go. When it returns to its friends and relatives with its tail lost, they will despise it and will not admit it into their company and this monkey will have to live in life-long shame and loneliness.

PRAHASTA: Your Majesty's orders will be carried out this instant. (*Signs to the servants there. Immediately several of them come, wind oil-dipped cloth round Hanuman's tail and then kindle it and drag him away by the ropes he had already been bound with*)

HANUMAN: (*His face is suffused with anger, but suppressing it he says to himself.*) I could kill these Rakshasas and free myself. But they are only carrying out their master's orders. I could kill him too, but it suits not my purpose. I shall endure this insult. I see some good too in it. I had seen Lanka only in the dark

and now that they are leading me through the streets, I can see the city in broad day-light and find out more clearly its lay-out and its defences.

(The rakshasas go outdragging Hanuman with his tail lit.)

(Curtain drops.)

ACT II

Scene 6

(Outskirts of the city of Lanka. Several rakshasas men and women come running in panic. The men carry bundles on their heads and under their arms and the women carry babies in their arms and bundles on their heads. The bodies of some are scorched and their clothes half-burnt.)

FIRST RAKSHASA: Oh! the whole city is blazing, set fire to by that ghastly monkey which breaking loose from its bonds leapt from house to house lighting it with its burning tail; and as the town is burning it shouts in great glee, calling for victory for Rama and Sugriva.

SECOND RAKSHASA: It is terrible, it is terrible; high buildings, many storeyed, are toppling down aflame crushing the running pedestrians and blocking the roads.

THIRD RAKSHASA: Whole rakshasa families have been taken unawares and burnt alive in their homes by the sudden fire.

FOURTH RAKSHASA: This is no ordinary monkey. It must be Yama himself in this shape come to destroy us all. We have to suffer for the sins of our king.

FIRST RAKSHASA WOMAN : My husband is gone, my brothers are gone and my children too except this little brat which I saved as it lay in the cradle and ran out with the few clothes I could hastily gather.

SECOND RAKSHASA WOMAN : My house is gone and all my belongings along with my protector and breadwinner. What shall I do now and where shall I go ?

THIRD RAKSHASA WOMAN : Why ever did Ravana bring this Sita here ? Evil has plagued us since her arrival. She is no woman, I believe, but our evil spirit taking that beautiful form to lure Ravana for the destruction of the rakshasa race.

(A fresh batch comes up running, shouting :— “ Run, run, the fire is spreading space and there can be no safety here either ”. All run away in panic)

FOURTH RAKSHASA WOMAN : Oh ! it was an evil moment that the vile Rakshasi Surpanaka, Ravana's wicked sister, herself stumpy, dark, and altogether ugly, sought the love of the most handsome and noble Rama. All our troubles have ensued thereupon.

(Enter Hanuman with his tail's flame quenched.)

HANUMAN : *(Smiling)* They intended to burn my tail, but I burnt their city instead and nothing remains of it that is undestroyed by fire. And how is it that while my tail was blazing I felt it cool all through ? I verily believe that it was Sita's virtue that protected me. Informed of my plight she must have prayed that I be uninjured and the power of her chastity has rendered that prayer

effective. (*After a slight pause his face shows sudden alarm and he exclaims in an alarmed and repentant tone.*) What a fool am I that I should have in anger acted rashly thus? In leaving no part of Lanka unburnt, I must have burnt Sita too. Oh! by this unthinking act I have in one moment undone everything good that I had done; and all by giving way to anger! Oh! what a heinous deed does not anger lead one to? An angry man knows not right nor wrong and does things which in a sober mood he would not think of doing. Anger hesitates not to misbehave towards decent men. Anger shrinks not from killing him that must be most respectfully cherished by one; anger knows nothing that one ought not to do and nothing that one ought not to say. He is commendable among men that can control his rising anger and cast it off like a serpent does its slough.

(*Voices from the air*): What remarkable deeds has Hanuman done! And most miraculous of all while everything in Lanka has been reduced to ashes that part of Ashoka Park where Sita lives is untouched by fire.

HANUMAN: (*Highly gladdened*.) Is what I hear true? If Sita unhurt? I shall fly there at once and verify, and if Sita is still alive, take her final leave and depart for the other shore. (*Goes*.)

(Curtain drops)

ACT III

Scene 1

(*The flat top of the mountain peak Prashravanagiri where Rama has made his temporary abode. Rama and*

Sugriva are sitting on a rock and Lakshmana is standing behind Rama.)

RAMA: The search parties that had gone East, West and North returned long ago and without any result. The one that went South has not come back at all and the time limit is long past. I doubt if we shall ever hear of them.

SUGRIVA: Lord Rama, meseems, there is yet no cause for full despair. This long delay seems significant. The group that has not yet returned consists of the best. Where Angada is the leader, Jambuvan the counsellor and Hanuman the executor, they are never known to fail in what has been entrusted to them:

(At this time Dadhi Mukha, Sugriva's uncle and chief keeper of Madhuvana, an ancestral orchard of Sugriva, followed by a few assistants jumps from the skies to where Sugriva is sitting and prostrating to him sobs.)

SUGRIVA: Why is it, uncle, that you have fallen on my feet and are crying? Arise, calm yourself and tell me what has happened.

DADHI MUKHA: Oh! King, your ancestral orchard Madhuvana which you so well guarded and preserved is gone. Its fruits have been plucked and eaten, its honey combs have all been snatched from the hives and drunk. Branches have been broken and leaves torn. Great damage has been done to the orchard by no other than your own nephew Angada, Jumbhuvan, Hanuman and their followers. When I with my assistants tried to prevent them,

overpowering us, they beat and kicked and scratched and bit us and mocked at us with indecent gestures, grinning and laughing at us. Angada himself struck me with a branch caring not that I was his great uncle. My lord, he and his followers deserve drastic punishment. Order, that they may be suitably chastised.

SUGRIVA: (Pleased and with a happy smile). What cheering news you have brought me, Dadhi Mukha! Go, go quick and tell Angada and the others that I am anxious to see them here. Tell them that a warm welcome awaits them and bid them repair here instantly.

DADHI MUKHA: (Mystified that his news has brought not anger but happiness to his master and himself converted to the mood.) Sire, I am glad you are pleased and not angered. I shall carry your message to Angada and send them here anon. (Flies back with his followers.)

LAKSHMANA: Sugriva, what was it that that vanara was telling you? While he wore a doleful face and spoke in a mournful voice, you seemed pleased with what he said and sent him back hurriedly with a smile.

SUGRIVA: Listen Lakshmana, and Rama, y. u too- My nephew Angada and the party that went with him to the South have returned. That vanara who had just now come here is my uncle Dadhi Mukha, the chief keeper of my orchard Madhuvana. That orchard is a valued possession of mine owned by the family for generations and so well-loved and guarded by me. Dadhi Mukha came to report that it was damaged by Angada and his

followers eating away the fruits and drinking the honey it produced. That definitely indicates that they have succeeded in their mission. Else in the first place they would not have dared to return at all so late after the prescribed time and in the second place they dared not have entered the garden and damaged it as reported. It must be their success that has given them the courage to commit the sacrilege in the full hope of securing a pardon. Anxious to get my belief confirmed and learn the full details of their exploits I sent back Dadhi Mukha to go and send them here at once.

(Rama and Lakshmana wear a pleasant look and just then a great commotion is heard in the air and immediately after, Angada, Jambhavan, Hanuman and other important vanaras of that group jump on to the stage in front of Rama and Lakshmana and Sugriva and bow to them.)

ANGADA: (*Addressing Rama*) Sire, Sita is found.

RAMA: (*Getting up and enthusiastically*) Where? When? Who saw her? How is she? How did she look? What did she say? How does she feel?

ANGADA: My lord, she was seen by Hanuman. (*Turning to Hanuman*) Hanuman, relate everything that you saw and did at Lanka to Sri Rama. How you found Sita, how you learnt of Lanka's defence and the strength of the rakshasas, how you fought and killed thousands of them including Aksha-Ravana's son, how you confronted Ravana himself and set fire to his capital.

SUGRIVA: (Smiling.) So it is as I had guessed. I knew that this difficult task could have been accomplished by none other than Hanuman. In strength, skill, enthusiasm, resourcefulness and devotion who is there to equal him?

HANUMAN: My lord, leaving my companions on the northern shore of the sea I leaped over to Lanka, Ravana's capital, and there I saw Sita sitting under a tree in Ashokavana in the midst of rakshasis that were constantly teasing and threatening her. She was sitting on bare ground and looked emaciated and covered with dirt and dust. She ate not nor slept, nor bathed. She wore no ornaments and her clothes were all soiled. Tears were flowing from her eyes in an incessant stream and she was heaving deep sighs. She was there in duress under Ravana's orders. Bereft of all real friends and surrounded only by enemies, she was plunged in profound grief and contemplated suicide. I managed to speak to her by singing your praises and gaining her confidence. Hesitant at first, suspecting me to be an enemy's agent or Ravana himself in disguise, but assured later that I was your messenger, she confided in me and we had an intimate talk. She told me to remind you of the incident of the crow, which pecked at her breast when you were at Chitrakuta and how you saved its life when it surrendered itself to you though it had done you a great wrong. She also wanted me to mention the other incident known only to you both when you put a new mark of vermillion on her forehead when the one she had, had faded. She was surprised that you had not yet gone to her

relief. She is eagerly waiting for it and wanted me to particularly tell you that unless you release her within another month you would not find her alive. Ravana has threatened to take her to bed by force if she does not go there of her own accord within another two months. She does not want to live that long but wants to die before another month is ended if she is not released by then. I have assured her that you would do so. She also gave me this jewel to be handed to you as a token from her. (*Hands him the Chudamani*).

RAMA: (Receiving the jewel) Ah! this rare jewel was a present to her from her father at her marriage and she wore it always in her hair. Hanuman, tell me everything you saw and heard. I long to know how she is feeling. Does she think of me?

HANUMAN: My lord! she has always been thinking of you and it is only that that is keeping her up. Indeed her first question to me was about you. Her devotion and faithfulness to you are remarkable. Neither by inducements, nor threats could Ravana entice her to him. She spurned all his advances and was not afraid to denounce him in severest terms for his wicked attempts. But, my lord, living amongst enemies only and with none to support her she is sorely tried and thinks of ending her life. You must hasten to her relief.

RAMA: Yes, we shall proceed at once. Hanuman, you have done me a great service in discovering her and I appreciate your greatness. Who else but you could have performed this impossible task of leaping over the

wide sea and penetrating into the terrible Rakshasa's capital? You have also seen and spoken to my wife so secretly hidden and closely guarded, learnt of Lanka's secrets, killed so many of the Rakshasas, confronted Ravana himself and set fire to the capital. You deserve a rich reward for this and I am greatly grieved that I am at present in no position to reward you as you deserve. The most I can give is this affectionate embrace. (*Hugs him affectionately. Then turning to Sugriva.*)

Sugriva, today is an auspicious day and let us move on. Let, Nala, the engineer, proceed in front with a lakh of strong bodied vanaras, preparing the way for the rest of the army. Let him choose the route through shady regions away from populated places whose inhabitants should feel no strain from the march and the camping of our huge army in their vicinity, but let it lie through areas where sufficient food and water could be made available for our troops. As they march on, let them level up uneven ground and build bridges across streams to make the army's passage easy. He must watch that the waters are not fouled by the rakshasas - who are hiding and do everything to harass our progress nor that they destroy the fruits and roots that form the food for our army. Let Gaja, Gava and Gavakhsha lead the advance guard which should consist of very powerful and fearless vanaras. Let Rishabha be in charge of the right wing and Gandhamadhana of the left. Myself mounted on the shoulders of Hanuman, Lakshmana sitting on the shoulders of Angada and you will lead the centre and let the rear be brought up by Jambhuvan and Sushena.

Let a small part of the army be left here to guard this place.

(Exit all. Curtain drops.)

ACT. III

Scene. 2

(Ravana's court. Ravana is sitting on the throne with the usual paraphernalia and his brother Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana are sitting on chairs as also his son Indrajit. His General Prahasta and Ministers Mahaparshva and Shankha, are also present.)

RAVANA: What a shame! That a lone monkey entering Lanka, inaccessible to the strongest, has wrought greatest havoc and destroyed the temple that was Lanka's ornament. It has discovered Sita's hiding place which I had tried to keep unknown to her husband and his brother. And now I am told they are camping on the northern shore of the ocean with Sugriva and his large army of vanaras ready to cross over and invade Lanka. I am bewildered and have summoned you all to take your counsel. Anyway Prahasta, place additional troops at all important points and strengthen our defence, and issue a proclamation that every able bodied rakshasa in every house in Lanka should be armed and be ready to come to the fight when summoned.

PRAHASTA: All that has already been done, O! King. But why this agitation, why this fear? We have a powerful army armed with fearful weapons. And

remember what sort of warrior you are. Did you not enter the impenetrable Bhagavati, the Yaksha capital, and slaying numberless Yakshas, did you not bring away their queen? Did you not conquer Kubera and snatch the Pushpaka Vimana from him? Did not Maya in dread of you marry his daughter Mandodari to you so that he may be allied to you? Did not the proud Danava Madhu, unconquered by any till then, surrender to you being defeated by you? Entering the nether regions did you not subdue Takshaka, Shanka and Jati and make them your vassals? Did you not totally break up Kalakeya Rakshasas after a year long fight with them and reduce them to utter weakness? What about the Varuna Putras who though supported by their big armies were vanquished by you? And how often have you defeated mighty Kshatriyas? What is this Rama to you and what are vanara monkeys? If you only order me so I shall go to the northern shore and massacre them all before they can ever set foot here.

(Several of the Rakshasa warriors including Indrajit hearing this heroic speech get up with raised swords saying that they will also follow him.)

VIBHISHANA: *(Getting up and signing to them all to sit down.)* Sit down ye all please. The time has not arrived for this show of arms. Ye think Rama is an ordinary person? He is very strong and he has conquered anger itself. You think you can consider him lightly? Look at Hanuman's exploits. Could any one have believed that he could cross the ocean and singly cause

so much ruin? They are all very powerful and it is unwise to close our eyes to the fact. And our king Ravana has given them a true cause for enmity and placed us in the wrong by bringing away Rama's wife here by force. (*Addressing Ravana*) Brother, it is a most heinous thing to take away another's wife. It not only brings us dishonour and infamy but many evil things flow out of such a sinful act. Give Sita back to Rama and remove the cause of this conflict. Restore her with full honours robing her with richest garments and decking her with costliest jewels. Do this before the hostile army invests Lanka. Else I am afraid that countless Vanara hordes will lay Lanka in total ruin.

RAVANA: Nay I can never give up Sita. I have seen none so beautiful as she. I brought her here with great tact and each day I see her augments my passion for her; and how can I give her up? I must possess her to satisfy that passion. But her husband is coming to take her away. He is said to be powerful and that Hanuman singly has demonstrated what the vanaras can do. With the backing of you all, I have always defeated very powerful enemies of mine and I have hopes that with your help I can defeat these too should they invade Lanka. But I am not sure. I would therefore like you all to deliberate over this and give me your considered advice.

KUMBHAKARNA: Brother, your behaviour is strange. A wise person takes counsel first and then acts; but you have acted without consulting us before and

now seek our advice. You have no doubt done a wicked thing, evil in its consequences; but having done it as a hero you should stick to it and see it through. What is the use of any repentance now. Persist and whatever danger may come out of it I shall fight in protection of you and destroy your enemies. I shall kill Rama and Lakshmana and all the vanaras that come with them. Have your enjoyment with Sita.

MAHAPARSHVA: Having risked so much and secured Sita why do you not satisfy your desire? If she is unwilling why not use force? You need fear none. Your brother Kumbhakarna, your son Indrajit and we all can protect you from any enemy that may threaten you.

RAVANA: I am pleased with your words, Mahaparsva, but I cannot do what you say. I shall disclose a secret which I had not hitherto. A long time back, one day, I saw Punjalika, an apsara woman, most beautiful, going to Brahma's abode and seeing me and afraid of me, hiding herself. I caught her and stripping her naked, ravished her. She must have complained of this to Brahma; for he summoned me and in great anger pronounced a curse on me that if I should consort with a woman by force against her will, my skull shall split into a hundred bits. It is in fear of this curse that I cannot force Sita to my bed. But I do not think I need fear Rama. He is unaware of my powers and is foolish enough to think of invading Lanka. I can rout him from here as I have so often routed Devas.

VIBHISHANA: Oh Kumbhakarna, Prahasta and Mahaparshva, what is it that you are advising our sovereign? When a monarch does wrong it is the duty of his loyal ministers to point it out and advise him to undo the wrong and not in fear of saying that that is not pleasing to him to encourage him in the wrong. They should even use force to drag their master out of his wrongful path. What you advise Ravana is sinful, wrong and altogether unrighteous. It can bring only ruin to us. Brother, Rama is an antagonist whom none can oppose and he has right on his side to boot. When his sharp, straight and unerring arrows fly over Lanka, then Kumbhakarna, Mahaparshva, Prahasta and your other ill advisers cannot even save themselves, let alone protect you. Restore his wife Janaki to Rama before he and his army arrive here and seek his friendship.

INDRAJIT: Father, what pusillanimous counsel is this uncle of mine offering you! None even distantly connected with our family could have uttered such cowardly words. He is bereft of strength, bereft of courage and bereft of dignity, and he wants to create fear in us. blind to our own strength. Vibhishana, know that the lowliest and the weakest of rakshasas can slay this Rama. Do you not remember that I bound Indra himself, the celestial king and the lord of the three worlds and dragging him here threw him on the ground? Brahma had to intervene and persuade us to let him go. Did not then the celestials in utter panic scatter to all quarters of the globe and did I not

fell Indra's elephant Iravata and break its tusk? And what are these mortals Rama and Lakshmana to me?

VIBHISHANA: Indrajit, you are yet a brat and your intellect is too callow to be capable of rightly judging things and discriminate between what is good for us and what is harmful. Your successes have made you arrogant and you speak out of ignorance. Who do you think could face Rama's arrows which come blazing through the air like tongues of the ultimate fire that destroys the universe. Brother, win Rama's grace by every means and let us live in peace and safety.

RAVANA: (*In great rage and frowning*) I have suffered your speech because you are my brother. But what a brother! It is safer to live with an open enemy or in the proximity of a provoked serpent than with one who inwardly is an enemy but poses as a friend. Poor relations cannot always be trusted. Envious of their richer kin and unable to tolerate their greater wealth, their greater might and their greater fame, they are always on the look out for ways and means of pulling them down and help in their ruin. Such relations are always to be feared. Vibhishana, if any one else had spoken thus I should have killed him at once. I do not want to be a fratricide. But traitor, stand not here a moment. Begone. Go out of my presence at once.

VIBHISHANA: Brother, you are my senior and I have to bear with any evil that you may speak of me. Good advisors who preach the right thing though displeasing, are rare in this world but those that preach

the wrong thing because it is pleasing can be found in plenty. Being your brother and wishing to save you from ruin, I tendered you my honest advice. But you have taken it amiss, charged me with evil intentions and bid me go. I cannot certainly stay on here to look upon your ruin, unable to ward it off. I shall therefore depart. Be happy and content.

(Vibhishana taking his mace walks out of the chamber followed by four others.)

(Curtain drops.)

ACT. III

Scene. 3

(Flat top of Suvela mountain in Lanka. Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Hanuman, Angada, Jambhuvan and a few other vanara leaders are seen standing)

RAMA: We are in Lanka now on Ravana's ground and our vanara army has filled all the hills and dales around. Though we were frustrated by the sea at first, it was under Nala's supervision, bridged over in five days and we had an easy passage over it. Vibhishana, Ravana's brother has come over to our side with four of his partisans. I have admitted them into our camp despite the opposition of some of you, both because it is never my nature to refuse shelter to those that seek it and also it is to our distinct advantage to have with us one that intimately knows all about the enemy. *(Turning towards Lanka City.)* Lo! there lies the city of Lanka. How

Beautiful and how strongly fortified it is? This Suvela hill overlooks the defences. We shall camp here tonight studying them, and tomorrow we shall begin the attack. Let Nala with a huge army invest the Eastern gates of Lanka opposing Prahasta. Let Angada, son of Vali, with an equal force confront Mahodara and Mahaparshva at the Northern gate. The valiant Hanuman will fight Indrajit at the Western gate and I with Lakshmana will proceed to the Southern gate where the vile Ravana is keeping guard and slay him there.

(At this juncture Vibhishana brings captive Shuka and Sarana, two ministers of Ravana, who were found spying disguised as vanaras and presenting them to Rama).

VIBHISHANA: Sri Rama, I found these two rakshasas, Shuka and Sarana, spying in our camp dressed like vanaras. My men could make them out and I have brought them to you here so that you may order them to be slain.

SHUKA and SARANA: Sire, we admit we came to spy under Ravana's orders and have been caught. We have already been sufficiently punished for the crime by the handling we have received. Please kill us not. You are known to be forgiving and kind. Spare us our lives, O Lord.

RAMA: Vibhishana, free them and let them go; but before they go, lead them along our camps and let them see the strength and disposition of our forces and report to their masters. There can be no harm in it. Now let us retire for rest.

(Curtain drops.)

ACT. III

Scene. 4

(*Ravana's court room. Ravana is sitting on the throne with his courtiers on either side in chairs.*)

PRAHASTA; Your Majesty, I am come fresh from the battle field. In all the wars we fought with the celestials and others I had not witnessed a battle so terrific and so furiously fought as this one that is now being waged between us and the vanaras. Many of our leading generals are pitted in personal combat against famous generals of theirs and many have been killed on either side. The field is strewn with dead and dying bodies of warriors on either side, and broken arms, chariots and dead elephants and horses fill the ground which is further flooded with streams of blood. The sound of conches and battle drums, the clash of arms, the battle din and the groans of dying combatants pervading the whole atmosphere are being echoed from the Trikuta mountains. Indrajit himself, pressed hard by the boy, Angada, had according to his art to make himself invisible and fight. Each side is furiously trying to get the better of the other. Vibhishana, your brother, is fighting valiantly on the enemy's side and is causing great damage to us. (*At this point Indrajit appears, bow in hand and quiver at his back and bleeding in several places, and bowing to Ravana.*)

INDRAJIT: Father, victory to us. Raining from invisible positions serpent arrows on Rama and his brother, I have confounded and killed them. They are

lying on the battle ground, their bodies pierced with my arrows in every spot. Thus is slain the slaughterer of your brothers Khara and Dushana and the man who was causing you so much anxiety, thinking of whom you could not sleep all last night. Now sleep in peace. He about whom you worried so much is dead and the vanara leaders, dismayed and disheartened, must be thinking of retreat leaving Lanka quiet and peaceful again. You can have Sita now with no fear of obstruction from any.

(Coming down from the throne and embracing him.)

RAVANA: Oh! My brave and skilful son, you are a legion to me. You have already turned the tide of war in our favour whose issue had seemed to be hanging in the balance. This is not the first time you have done so. With you by my side and with my own boons and valour I need fear none. I am truly proud of you. *(Then turning to one of his ministers.)* You arrange to take Sita in the Pushpaka and flying over the battle field show her Rama and Lakshmana lying dead there. Seeing her spouse slain she may easily yield to me.

MINISTER: I shall do so Sire. *(Exit-)*

RAVANA: Now we shall go and celebrate our victory. *(Exit.)*

(Curtain drops.)

ACT III

Scene 5

(Battle field outside Lanka's ramparts. Rama and Lakshmana are lying on the ground, their bodies wholly covered with arrows and Sugriva, Angada, Hanuman, Jambhuvan, Nala and other vanara chiefs are standing around them with sad and frightened faces and actually weeping. Sugriva is kneeling by Rama's side feeling his pulse. Vibhishana enters and seeing Rama and Lakshmana lying on the ground stops dead and in a surprised and scared voice.)

VIBHISHANA: What do I see here? Rama and Lakshmana are lying on the ground their bodies fully covered with arrows and blood oozing out of every wound. Are they dead? Oh! these noble heroes, innocent of all deceitful warfare must have become easy victims to the treacherous tricks of that unscrupulous Indrajit, master in the art of sly war, and must be dead. Now that they are dead what is my fate to be? With full faith in their invincibility and hoping to gain with their help the throne of Lanka I sought their shelter but those hopes have now been belied and my relentless brother Ravana will have everything his own way. Woe is me. *(Starts weeping)*

SUGRIVA: *(Getting up, going to Vibhishana and holding his hand.)* Vibhishana, it is not fit that you should weep thus. Doubt not you will still be crowned king of Lanka. Rama has promised you that and sure

Rama's promise will never fail. He is not dead nor Lakshmana. Severely wounded they have only fainted and will soon recover. Wipe off your tears. (*Turning to his father-in-law Sushena*) Father-in-law, as soon as these two princes recover from their swoon, you take them to Ayodhya together with the Vanara generals. I shall remain here, kill this demon Ravana with his friends and relations and freeing Sita, take her over to Ayodhya.

SUSHENA: There are two hills on the shores of the white sea called Chandra and Drona and they contain two medical roots named Sanjeevakarni and Vishalyakarni, very effective in the healing of wounds. These were used by the Devas while churning the ocean and have been left there. Send Hanuman, a rapid flier, to fetch them here immediately. (*Meanwhile Rama gets up, rubs his eyes and looks round.*)

RAMA: I seem to have been in a swoon. Ah! I have been covered with arrows and sorely wounded. Indrajit was fighting here and had been worsened by Angada; but he suddenly became invisible and arrows started pouring on me. (*Then turning to Lakshmana and seeing him lying with closed eyes and covered with arrows too*) Oh! Lakshmana is lying here his body fully pierced with arrows His eyes are closed and he is motionless. Is he dead? (*He shakes Lakshmana's body crying "Lakshmana, Lakshmana". But receiving no response, bursts into weeping.*) Lakshmana is dead. my dear brother Lakshmana is dead. What wretch am I that standing by his side could not protect him that protected me and Sita in a thousand dangers? Oh

Lakshmana, speak, do speak. No, he is dead. stark dead. What further purpose have I here now? What does Sita mean to me any more? What use is life itself to me hence-forth? If I search carefully enough I may find in every country a wife like Sita but where can I find a brother like Lakshmana? We came into the forest together and if I should return to Ayodhya without him, what can I say to his bereaved mother Sumitra anxious to see her loved child return? And what to his other mothers who have an equal affection for him? This brother of mine was a counsellor to me and my ally in all my fights standing by my side. Who can replace him now? How can I live if he is dead? I cannot return to Ayodhya un-accompanied by him. Just as he followed me to the woods leaving all comforts behind I shall follow him to death's realm leaving my life here. I can never, never, part with you, Lakshmana. While you in all places and at all times engaged yourself only in serving me, I, standing by you and close to you, have through my negligence allowed this harm to come to you. Oh! what virtues you possessed! In recalling them I feel all the more guilty towards you. (*Turning to Sugriva*) Oh Vanara King, this brother of mine, well versed in the use of various Astras was capable of conquering even Indra, the celestial king, and now he is lying here helpless in a hero's death bed. My plans have all gone to the winds. I had promised Vibhishana that I would make him the king of Lanka. That promise has now turned false. Sugriva, tell him that owing to my mis-

fortune I could not fulfill it and ask him to go back to his own place and make his peace with Ravana. And you all return to Kishkinda with your armies. Ravana, when he learns that I am no more, would surely chase you all. It is not wise that you should remain here. Oh Sugriva, Hanuman did things that were impossible for others, Jambhuvan fought most valiantly, Angada, Sampathi, Mainda, Dvividha, Kesari and most others displayed great valour in the fight, but all that has turned out to be purposeless. Sugriva, you yourself have done for me everything that a faithful friend can do, and discharged your duties as a sworn friend. I am most pleased with it. Now I release you from all further obligations and permit you all to go back. Return. (*Everyone is in tears and sunk in grief. At that moment a great blast of wind is felt and Garuthmantha appears following it.*)

GARUTHMANTHA: (*Bowing to Rama.*) Rama, born of the Ikshvaku dynasty, I bow to you. I am Garuthmantha, friend of your family. Learnig that you and your brother were encaged with serpent arrows and had swooned, I hurried here. You both who are used to only honest fights have been deluded by that deceitful warrior Indrajit and hit by these sharp and poisonous arrows from concealed positions. It is fortunate I came to know of it. I am capable of curing you and excepting me none could have relieved you of them. (*So saying he goes over their bodies with his hand and the arrows drop off their bodies, as if of their own accord and both the brothers stand up fully cured and sound.*)

GARUTHMANTHA: (*Continuing*) You are both well again. My mission fulfilled I wish to depart. I know you will be victors in this war and will kill all the rakshasas in Lanka saving those who are either too old or too young or belong to the other sex and win back Sita. But be careful how you fight these wily rakshasas. (*So saying he goes round Rama and Lakshmana and bowing to them flies away. Seeing Rama and Lakshmana well again a great acclamation arises from the vanara army, drums are beaten and conches are blown in joy, and cries of victory to Rama, "Long live Rama and Lakshmana." go up*).

(Curtain drops)

ACT. III

Scene. 6

(*Ravana's court room. He is seated on the throne and his courtiers fewer than usual are seated on chairs on either side*).

RAVANA: All along, this war has not gone well with us. When Indrajit announced that he had killed Rama and Lakshmana we flew into high glee which however proved premature and short lived, for reports came shortly after, that they had only swooned and soon recovering from it they were fighting with doubled vigour. And the vanaras armed with only stones and limbs of trees have exhibited marvellous strength and skill in battling with Rakshasas superiorly armed and laid low thousands of them together with their distinguished leaders. Thus Dhumraksha, Vajradamshttra, Akampana

and even Prahasta have been already all killed. Even I, engaging Hanuman, Angada, Nala and Lakshmana with powerful arms, could produce no effective impression. And my encounter with Rama ended in great disgrace to me. He smashed my chariot, shattered my bow and felled me to the ground with my crown flying off. He could have easily killed me in that condition, but he let me go saying that he could not think of further harassing me when I was disarmed, dismounted and tired and told me to go back to my palace, rest and return to the battle refreshed, in a new chariot and with new weapons. What a humiliating situation for a world conqueror! How can I avenge it? I can only turn to my sleepy brother, Kumbhakarna, for help in such a predicament. He would never desert me when help was needed, But while I am in this plight he is soundly sleeping. He went to sleep only eight days back and once asleep he wakes not for six months or eight. But it is imperative that he be woken up. (*Turning to a courtier*) Go, take enough help and by the beating of gongs and drums and blowing of conches and trumpets close to his ears, a hundred and a thousand at a time, by pricking and prodding his body with weapons sharp and heavy and with all other means, wake him up somehow and rousing him, bring him to me immediately. Getting up he feels hungry and eats every thing that he comes across. See that he will have enough food and drink placed before him when he opens his eyes-cart loads of meat and other food and hundreds of barrels of wine.

COURTIER: I shall do so, my lord. (*Goes*)

RAVANA: (*In a sad note.*) My army has dwindled and my treasury is emptied, but even in this crippled condition I cannot give up thoughts of Sita and she is unyielding. She was taken over the battle field in the Pushpaka and shown Rama and Lakshmana lying on the ground and was told they were dead. I tried to further delude her, by rolling in front of her, severed heads identically resembling those of Rama and Lakshmana to create an illusion of their having been killed, but truth reached her somehow and these tricks had no effect. I am thus frustrated every way and know not what to do. (*At that moment Kumbhakarna enters and approaching Ravana rapidly and bowing to him*)

KUMBHAKARNA: Why did you, brother, so urgently arouse me in the midst of my sleep? What danger is threatening you? What do you want of me?

RAVANA: (*With a happy face, rises up from his throne and quickly advancing towards his brother and embracing him affectionately when he meets him.*) Kumbhakarna, I am glad you have woke up. Many things adverse to me have happened since you went to sleep, and I am now sorely distressed.

KUMBHAKARNA: Tell me, king, what your trouble is and whatever may be bothering you I shall surely relieve you of it.

RAVANA: (*Happily.*) Oh affectionate brother, I know I could always depend on you. You have great

strength and skill and are quite devoted to me. You are aware that in our last council at which you were present we discussed Rama's intended invasion of Lanka. The invasion has since taken place and bridging the sea the two brothers have crossed over here with a large vanara army and invested our capital. In all my wars hereto-fore we have been easy victors. But these vanaras are gaining over us. My vast army has been considerably reduced, most of my generals have been killed and my treasury exhausted. I could only look to you to save the situation. As you have won victories for me in my previous wars with your indomitable valour do so now too. It was for this purpose that I woke you up from your profound sleep. Go to the battle, my dear brother, and wrest the victory from the enemy's hands.

KUMBHAKARNA: Ravana, this is the consequence of your ill deeds. If you had listened to the good advice that had been proffered you, this situation could have been avoided. But you would not. A king who rejects good advice because it pleases him not and accepts only what is pleasing though ill always comes to harm. What use is it to repent then?

RAVANA: (*A little angry.*) Brother, is this the time to assess the good and bad of what has been already done or apportion blame? What has been done cannot be recalled? It behoves you now not to stay here moralising to me but to go and redeem by your deeds of valour whatever ill effects have flowed from my wrong acts. If your intentions are otherwise do what you please but

stand not here hurting an already hurt mind by recalling my follies. He is a real friend and he is a real relative who though one has acted wrongly and got into difficulties, stays not condemning him but rushes to render him whatever help is needed to save him.

KUMBHAKARNA: Brother, do not get angry. I spoke as I did, not because I had any intention of deserting you in your distress but because I am your closest relative and can give you frank advice. Shed off your fear. It is no task for me to destroy your enemies. I shall go to the battle forthwith and cutting off the heads of Rama and Lakshmana bring them to you very soon and make you happy. I shall cause such slaughter among the monkeys and spread such terror that those that survive will instantly leave Lanka and fly to their homes. While I am alive I shall allow no danger to touch you.

RAVANA: Brave brother, they were the words that I expected to hear from you and they are the words that I am sure you will make good. Go, dear brother, and may success attend you.

(Exit Kumbhakarna. Enters a messenger.)

FIRST MESSENGER: Sire, I have come fresh from the battle field and I have to report to you that Naranthaka has been killed.

RAVANA: Has he been killed too?

(Another messenger enters the court room hastily and bowing to Ravana)

SECOND MESSENGER: Sire, I bring you more bad news, Devantaka, Mahodara and Mahaparshva have all been slain.

THIRD MESSENGER: (*Coming running.*) Oh king, Atikaya is dead.

RAVANA: (*In despair and anger.*) Defeat, more defeat and yet more defeat. Have I to constantly hear of our reverses only? Is there no good news to reach my ears at all? I trust Kumbhakarna will reverse our reverses and snatch the victory for us. Go, some one, and bring news of how he is faring.

FOURTH MESSENGER: Sire, I have just now returned from the battle field. A terrific battle is going on between your brother Kumbhakarna and the vanara chiefs. The monkeys are scattering in fear at the very sight of him and he has already killed thousands of them. The several monkey chiefs, Angada, Nala, Hanuman and others engaged him at different times and all suffered severely at his hands. Sugriva, their king, fainted from his blow and fell down. Kumbhakarna was bringing him to Lanka in his arms, but having regained consciousness, Sugriva managed to escape from Kumbhakarna's hold and got back to the vanaras. Lakshmana later opposed Kumbhakarna but could do little. Now Rama and Kumbhakarna are pitted against each other in a most fearful feud.

RAVANA: Brave brother, you have never disappointed me.

FIFTH MESSENGER: (*Enters in great agitation and quite depressed and sadly.*) Your Majesty, I bring you

most doleful and disheartening news. Your brother, Kumbhakarna, who fought valiantly and wrought havoc in the enemy's army has succumbed to Rama's arrows at last. *(Ravana is staggered at hearing the news, becomes pale, and getting up from the throne, totters and dropping down into the chair again, faints. The few courtiers present all rush up to the throne. After being fanned by the attendants and sprinkled with cold water he recovers and sitting up in the throne, in sorrowful voice and sobbing.)*

RAVANA: Oh, brave brother! have I lost you too? Have you deserted me and gone away to Death's abode without fulfilling your promise to rid me and the rakshasa race of the danger that is threatening our very existence? With you living I need have feared no one, but losing you what protection have I? With you at my back I had quelled all the races and all the worlds but now that you are dead how can I prevent their rising in revolt and winning back what they had lost? With your support I was able to curb their pride and power and hold them in check but now they will grow more arrogant than before and extend their power. How {they would laugh at my discomfiture and rejoice? Could I really believe that you who were harmed not by Indra's thunder-bolt have succumbed to Rama's arrow? What fate is it that we who vanquished Devas, Asuras, Gandharvas and other superior races should suffer defeat at the hands of mere men and vanaras? I listened not to the good advice you and Vibhishana gave, and drove away that righteous minded brother of mine. I am now reaping the consequences thereof. All hope has been lost for me. Though alive I am as good as dead.

COURTIERS : Sire, you, a person of such heroic past, why lose courage and grieve thus ? Even without arms you have conquered most powerful enemies often enough. That might and valour of yours have no whit abated. We are all here to serve you. And think of Indrajit of incomparable strength and spirit, of great skill and bravery. Can any one stand before this conqueror of Indra who can fight not only with ordinary arrows but also with powerful Asthras, who can fight not only open battles but is an adept in the war of illusions ? Why fear while he is yet alive ?

RAVANA : Yes, Indrajit is my best hope now. After I heard of the death of Makara I sent him to go to the battle field himself and stem the enemy's onslaught. I do not know how he has fared.

ONE COURTIER : Sire, after he left here, he went straight to the temple to perform the Nīkumbhini sacrifice which gives him the power to create illusions and become invisible. Having performed it successfully he created an illusory Sita and placing her in his chariot and rushing to the battle field he cut off her head in the presence of Hanuman and other vanara leaders so that they may feel that their expedition was now purposeless and return to their own country. This had the effect intended and threw them all including Rama into gloom and a sense of frustration and made them think of giving up the fight. But Vibhishana, the traitor, explained to them how you so much wanted Sita, and would never, never allow her to be killed and how it was all an illusion created by Indrajit who had mastered the art

and that the real Sita was safe. This heartened them again and they have resumed the fight with renewed vigour. I left the battle field then and I do not know the present stage of the fight.

(A messenger appears hastily with a happy face and bowing to Ravana)

MESSENGER: Good news, your Majesty. I am coming from the battle field where Indrajit has acquitted himself gloriously. Ploughing his way into the enemy's ranks he has mowed them down every where. Monkeys are scattering at his approach like dry leaves before the wind. Making himself invisible he is showering arrows over the enemy's lines laying their leaders low. Excepting Hanuman and a few others most of them have fallen down—Nala, Mainda, Gaja, Jambhuvan, Rishabha, Sugriva and Angada too. Using the Brahmastra he hit Rama and Lakshmana and sent them into a swoon again. Having thus shattered the enemy's strength he has secretly proceeded to the temple to perform again the Nikumbhini sacrifice and renew his powers.

RAVANA: This is glad news indeed. What a son have I in Indrajit, mightier than myself in all respects! He has dispelled my fear and made me breathe freely again. Once he successfully completes the sacrifice no power in all the worlds can withstand him.

MESSENGER: *(Coming in great agitation)* Sire, treachery, treachery has undone us all. Indrajit has been betrayed by Vibhishana, your traitorous brother, that deserted us. Rama and Lakshmana and the several

monkey leaders who had been hit by Indrajit revived by the use of medicinal herbs quickly brought by Hanuman from the Himalayas and were getting ready for battle again. Meanwhile Indrajit unknown to others had gone to perform the Nikumbhini sacrifice. Vibhishana somehow coming to know about it and aware of the powers it would give to Indrajit if it were allowed to be successfully completed warned the enemies of it and urged them to proceed at once to interrupt the sacrifice and engage Indrajit in battle, and himself led Lakshmana and the vanara chiefs to the temple. Indrajit in great rage at being disturbed left the sacrifice and rushed against the enemies. The battle that ensued has been the most fierce so far fought. Indrajit and Lakshmana seemed most evenly matched and they each strove hard to get the better of the other. They met Astra by Astra hurling them unintermittently neutralising them one by the other. A little later, Lakshmana deftly broke Indrajit's chariot and the monkey leaders killed the horses and driver. Indrajit fought standing on the ground and for a long time the issue seemed to be in doubt till Lakshmana drawing at last the aindrastra shot at Indrajit which unresistingly flying at him cut off his head.

(Ravana is stunned at hearing this, gets up and staggers down into his chair again. Lowering his head and covering his face with his two hands sits still for a short while. Then lifting his head and in a wailing tone.)

RAVANA: Is Indrajit also slain? Have I lost my son too? What incredible things are happening, Indrajit, the

conqueror of the celestial king, my son, no inferior to me, Indrajit, who by his tapas had pleased Brahma and won many a gift from him, Indrajit, unconquerable by any Sura or Asura has been slain by a mere man? My dearest son, of whom I could be justly proud, is gone. What use is my kingdom to me hereafter, what use is my life? I was the greatest hitherto in all the worlds, unrivalled and held high my head, Now I am humbled to dust and utter ruin stares me in the face! *(Then lowering his head again and holding it in his hands thinks for a moment. Then raises it again and his face looks determined and fully indignant!)*

RAVANA: *(In an angry voice)* This is no time for grief. I have cast away from my heart both sadness and dismay and intense anger has occupied the void. I must revenge myself. I still have my bow, I still have my arms, I still have my impenetrable coat of mail Brahma's gift and I still possess my boons. I shall go forth at once and kill Rama, kill Lakshmana, kill Sugriva and kill Vibhishana, that traitorous brother of mine, And before I proceed to the battle I shall kill Sita first, the author of all my woes. Bring me my sword. *(He is given his sword and he starts to Ashokavana to kill Sita but Souparshva, his minister, stops him saying)*

SOUPARSHVA: Oh king, it becomes you not to kill a woman. Vent your anger against her husband, Rama. Today is the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight and tomorrow is the New Moon Day. So go to the battlefield today alone. Your chariot, your armour and

every thing necessary have been made ready and there is still a large Rakshasa army to follow you. Lead them to the battle.

RAVANA: Yes, in anger I thought of killing Sita only to spite Rama, but I gain little thereby. My whole ire should be directed against Rama, that arch enemy of mine. Let us proceed to the battle field and stop his impudence. (Exit all)

(Curtain drops.)

ACT III

Scene 6

(*Clouds are floating on the stage. Indra, the celestial king, enters*).

INDRA: How amazing, how terrific and how absorbing too is the duel that is going on between Rama and Ravana? There was never one such before nor could there be another such again. The skill, the bravery, the manoueuvering, the alertness, the keenness and the determination that each of them is displaying in this battle can scarcely be matched in any other fight. There is no comparison for it. It has to be compared only with itself. The Devas, the Gandharvas, the Pannagas, the Rishis and others assembled in the sky, are all watching it with great wonder, keenness and interest, and the warring Vanara and Rakshasa hosts have ceased fighting themselves; and dropping down their arms are gazing dazed and dumb-struck at the fighting heroes, but while Ravana has been

fighting from his chariot fully equipped with wonderful arms, drawn by well trained steeds and guided by an experienced and intelligent Sarathi, Rama is fighting on foot with his bow in his hand and a quiver at his back. It is not fair that Rama should be so handicapped. I shall therefore go and send my own chariot to Rama well providing it with my celebrated weapons and my expert driver Mathali to guide it. I shall then join the Devas again to witness the battle. (*goes and the curtain drops*)

ACT.. III

Scene. 7

(*A part of the battle-field. Ravana's sarathi is seen driving away his car from the battlefield, with Ravana sitting inside, furious with anger*).

RAVANA: (*angrily*) Idiot, how darest thou, without my permission nor with my knowledge, turn my chariot away from the battlefield. In all the myriads of fights that I have fought against most valiant warriors I have not once turned my back to my enemy; but now thou treacherous fool, perhaps in the pay of the enemy, and unfaithful to thy master whose bread thou hast eaten or owing to thine own pusillanimity, hast shamed me in the eyes of the valiantest of all the combatants I had met so far, and the eyes of all the Celestials and others that have gathered in the sky to witness the feud, by reversing my car from the battle front making me seem to have abandoned the fight and fleeing. Explain thy conduct, villian.

SARATHI: Sire, I am no traitor bribed by the enemy, nor disloyal to my munificent master whose bounties I have tasted, nor am I a coward. A true driver of a war chariot I should watch the battle trends, must be skillful in foiling the enemy's tactics and manouvre to secure advantageous positions, know how and when to push forward and when and how to recede, and above all read from the facial expressions of the warriors his moods, intentions and feelings and drive the chariot accordingly. I have been observing you for some time and noticed how your grip was weakening,, how the battle was going against you, how your self-confidence was waning and how gloom was gradually spreading over your face. For you to continue to fight in that state was, I felt, to invite certain destruction. It was therefore to save you from that disaster that I turned back the chariot to take you to a safer place for the nonce. If I have done wrong thereby, please order me what I shall do next and I shall carry out the order.

RAVANA: (*meekly*) Sarathi, all that you have now said is true. I have known you well and I recognise that what you have done was with good intent and to my benefit. I reward you therefor with this gold bangle. (*removes one of his gold bangles and throws it at the sarathi.*) But I have reached the stage of desperation. I cannot run away from the fight now with my hated enemy standing in front of me. Let the world witness either my destruction or his. So turn round the car and take me to the battle front.

SARATHI: So be it my lord. May victory be yours
(*Turns round the car and drives it to the front. Curtains drop*).

ACT III

Scene 8

(*Another part of the battle field. Rama is seen standing in a chariot holding his bow with his left hand, and an arrow in his right hand hanging down. The bottom of the bow is resting on the floor of the car and his chin is resting on the upper end*)

RAMA: (*in a disappointed tone*) I have been battling with Ravana for long. I killed Vali the strong with one arrow and so also Maricha. The slaughter of the sixteen thousand Rakshasas at janasthan was a mere sport to me and took little time. I have incessantly rained arrows over Ravana and hurled against him axes, spears, maces and all other deadly weapons of war. They were all well-tried ones and I could always rely on their effectiveness. But these very weapons and missiles with which I killed Khara and Dushana in janastha, Viradha in Krauncha vana and Kabandha in the Dandaka forest seem to have no effect against Ravana. I have used every weapon that I possessed and every missile known to me, and how is that Ravana is not slain ! I have felled him often but each time he has instantly risen up and is fighting with greater vigour. How shall I kill him ? or is he indestructible ?

MATALI: My Lord, why do you feel so baffled ? Are you not aware that none of the weapons you have so far used against Ravana is powerful enough to kill him and

must I remind you that the missile ordained by the Creator for Ravana's destructions and given to you by the saint Agastya for use is lying idle in your quiver? Take it out. Shoot Ravana with it. kill him and complete your victory.

RAMA: Yes, Matali, you are right. I thank you for bringing it to my mind. Now this missile will see the end of Ravana. *(Takes an arrow from the quiver, plants it in his bow and drawing the string to its fullest extent shoots. The sky is suddenly illumined with great brightness as the arrow is taken out and thundrous sounds follow the flight of the arrow. There is a thud and the stage is suddenly darkened. The curtain falls)*

ACT. III

Scene. 9

(Battlefield. Ravana is lying dead surrounded by Rama Lakshmana, Sugriva, Vibhishana etc., All are sad.)

VIBHISHANA . *(Wailing)* Oh! brother Ravana, great hero, renowned for your valour and strength throughout the ages and throughout the worlds, how low you are lain now on the ground with your resplendant crown fallen off your majestic head! I had forewarned you against such a fate, but you heeded me not and alas it has overtaken you now. My words did not please you blinded with passion, and neither your minister Prhastha nor your brother Kumbhakarna nor your son Indrajit could see, as I did, that this would be the result of your keeping Sita captive and neither of them would divert you from your wrongful path. Today, he

that was surprising all the world with his deeds, he that was the subject of all praise and fame is gone. Today, the Earth is bereft of its greatest hero, Today, I feel, the Sun of my life is set. Alas! that I should have lived to see such a day!

RAMA: Vibhishana, you have no need to grieve your brother's demise. He died no coward's death. While he was living, the world rang with his heroic deeds and in dying he has only added to that glory of his. Death must come to every mortal sometime and though he has now become a victim to that inevitable law, his fame yet lives. So grieve not. Think of the further things to do.

VIBHISHANA: Oh Ramachandra, this brother of mine was no ordinary person. He had attained unbounded fame and power and he had not so far known defeat in any war. And now you had to curb him like a sea that was overflowing its shores. Despite his follies he has done many good things. His charities are wide; he has supported innumerable dependants and given many rich presents to his friends and relatives both in kind and money and pleased them, while he severely chastised those that he disliked and held them in terror. He had mastered many sciences and was highly learned. As a king he was mighty and ruled well, He was religious and had performed many sacrifices. He was serving his gods well and earned their approval. Such a person is now dead. Please permit me to perform his funeral in a fitting manner.

RAMA. I recognise the greatness of Ravana. His death has ended all the enmity that I bore him. In fact

I wanted to enjoin on you to perform his obsequies in a manner suitable to his greatness. By all means do so

(Enter Mandodari, Ravana's queen with others of his wives crying and reeling and wailing: "Oh king, Oh husband." and full of tears One kneels by Ravana's feet and presses them, one puts her arm round his neck and falls on it, another lays her head on his chest, another takes his arm and puts it round her own neck; Mandodari places his head on her lap and strokes his head and his hair. Some fall fainting by his side and some sit round him stunned, with tears pouring from their eyes.)

ONE LADY: He who had subdued Indra and was a terror to him; he of whom even the God of Death was afraid and could not approach, he who had wrested Pushpaka from Kubera, the king of kings, that hero lies here now killed by a mere man.

SECOND LADY: He who had no fear of Asuras, Suras or Pannagas, he whom the Devas, Danavas and Rakshasas had found it impossible to kill, that incomparable hero lies here slain by only a man as if he were a despicable weakling.

THIRD LADY: Alas, this lord of ours brought Sita here for his own death and though advised by Vibhishana, his brother, wishing him well, to restore Sita to Rama and be friends with him, he derided him and now he has left us desolate.

FOURTH LADY: Dear lord, dear king, how much your enemies must be rejoicing now at your death? You

could have still remained a terror to them if you had not brought Sita here by force? By that one sinful act you brought calamity on to yourself and us all too.

MANDODARI: (*Wailing*) Ravana, my dear husband, the lord of my life, is this the end of all our happy days? Often and often we flew together in the Vimana over the Himalayas and viewed their valleys; we visited all the countries and roamed about them at will; we went many a time to Bhogavati, the beauteous capital of the wealthy king Kubera, and revelled in his park Chaitravana and we often played in Nandanavana too, the park of the celestials. Gone are those happy days now. Who could have thought that you would be killed in battle? Who could have believed that *he* whom Indra himself and the most powerful of Danava, Asura and Gandharva warriors were incapable of killing would be slain in battle by a mere man? You were a mighty king ruling over a vast domain comprising all the worlds; you commanded a huge army of rakshasas which no enemy of yours found it possible to withstand, you had a strong impenetrable armour and bore many fearful arms; you were served by many a brave general and wise and experienced ministers; you possessed uncountable wealth, you had performed severe tapas and many sacrifices and acquired great powers therefrom, you had mastered all Sciences, obtained very high knowledge and yet you were overcome in war by Rama, an insignificant human wanderer in the woods without kingdom, without wealth and without armour helped by a few unarmed monkeys. Who could have dreamt that any simple man could have performed this

miracle No, Rama is not a mere man. The day I learnt that single-handed he slew fourteen thousand well-armed rakshasas led by your redoubtable brothers at Janasthan I guessed that he was more than human; the day that I came to know that his messenger Hanuman had leaped over a hundred leagues of sea and freely roamed about and set afire which it was impossible for any even to look at without your permission I realised that Rama was a Super-Being and the day that I was told that the vast sea was bridged I was confirmed that Rama was divine. What ordinary man could have done such things. And you incurred the enmity of such a person by stealing his wife and forcibly bringing her over here. You would not listen to your good brother Vibhishana's advice and my own importunity to deliver her back to Rama and make peace with him. What enchantment did you see in her which you could not have found in me? Either in birth, looks or position, either in adornments, dress or deportment could she excel me? In your harem you had at least a score of women more beautiful than she, but blind to their attractions you thought Sita was more beautiful and pursued her. But did you get your desires fulfilled? You happened to place your affections on a most virtuous woman, a paragon, an example for womankind for all ages and for all climes, who steadfastly spurned all your advances. Why did you not give her up even then? Nay, you had to keep her to bring on your own death. I wonder that she did not burn you up to ashes with her power of chastity. I am surprised that you did not get scorched while you carried her

here in your arms. Ravana, Yama, the God of Death, dared not have entered Lanka but *you* invited him and introduced him into your capital in the shape of Sita by bringing her here; and lo the result. Death has claimed not only you but the whole rakshasa race and us all too. None could have killed you. *You* have killed yourself by this sinful act. You had conquered your senses and thereby you were enabled to conquer all the world; but those suppressed senses seem to have avenged themselves by rebelling against you and enslaving you. By making you enamoured of Sita they drove you to your doom. I used to be very proud as the daughter of Maya, a mighty rakshasa king, and wife of Ravana, the mightiest of all; and that pride, I deem, has brought me this fall. What am I now? A helpless, derided, disconsolate widow, sorrowing all my life, while Sita, reunited with her husband, lives merrily, cherished by her husband and honoured by all. Oh, that I should have lived to see this day! It is now meeter for me to die and join you in the other world.

(Lays her head on Ravana's body and sobs heavily)

RAMA: Vibhishana, it is time that the ladies are sent back to the palace and you attend to Ravana's funeral. You may thereafter prepare for your coronation. Lakshmana will come and crown you king of Lanka.

VIBHISHANA: Yes, my lord. I shall attend to your behests.

(A decorated palanquin is brought. Ravana's body is placed in it and covered with rich clothes. It is then

carried inside the screen with the ladies following it, wailing and crying. Vibhishana also follows it inside.)

RAMA : (*Turning to Hanuman.*) Hanuman, did you convey to Sita the news of our victory and the death of Ravana as I instructed you to ?

HANUMAN : Yes Sire, she was greatly pleased to hear of it and her faded face shone again as the full moon. She expressed a keen desire to meet you.

RAMA : I understand that she has not washed herself since she was brought here and has not changed her dress. Let her have a good bath, change into fresh clothes, adorn herself and come.

(A big tumult is heard. Rama turns round and finds that the guards are driving away the people that had gathered around at a distance beating them with canes, in order to clear the ground of vulgar eyes when Sita comes..)

RAMA : (*In some anger.*) Why are you driving away those people and beating them ? Let them remain. There is no harm in their seeing Sita. (*Thereon the guards abstain and the crowd remains at a distance watching the events. Sita accompanied by Hanuman appears with a silent smile, well washed, well clothed, fully ornamented and her face slightly bent on account of shyness. Rama shows no enthusiasm at her approach and is distinctly cold. Lakshmana, Sugriva, Hanuman, and the others around notice it and are surprised and apprehensive and look down on the ground. Rama addresses Sita in a cold tone.*)

RAMA : Sita, I have achieved a great victory and killed the arch culprit that stole my wife. Sugriva has been true to his friendship and has faithfully stood by me and helped me considerably in gaining this victory. Hanuman has distinguished himself in this affair with impossible feats of strength and skill and the other vanara chiefs standing here have rendered me yeoman service and deserve my thanks. Vibhishana's help too is not small. We have completely won the war, and all my pledges have been redeemed. Sugriva and Vibhishana have been established as kings of Kishkinda and Lanka and I have freed you. But I want to make it clear to you that I did all this not for the sake of you but to retrieve my honour which had been sullied by the rakshasa. I have accomplished it publicly for all the world to witness. Now that I have wiped off the stain that had unfortunately got attached to the Ikshvaku race, that I have with self-efforts removed the blemish that had clung to me and now that the period of exile is at an end, I wish to return to Ayodhya with Lakshmana. As for you, you have lived too long in the harem of the voluptuous Ravana and consistently with my honour I cannot take you back as my wife. You are free to choose your own life hereafter. You may live with either of my brothers Lakshmana or Bharatha or even with Sugriva or Vibhishana or any other you like. I shall have nothing more to do with you.

(Every one is aghast at this speech of Rama and bows down his head. Sita becomes pale and is seen

shaking, tears flow from her eyes profusely. Rama after finishing his speech hangs down his head looking on the ground.)

SITA: (*In a sad trembling voice*) Did I hear those words aright? Did they proceed from my noble husband's mouth? Rama, lord of my life, we were married young and in all these years of our intimate companionship have you not found out my real heart? How could you suspect me of any heinous conduct? Have you given no consideration to my birth or breeding either? If a bad woman has gone wrong in the circumstances you mention, would you condemn the whole womankind therefor? My lord, believe me I am not such a woman. Your suspicions are most unfounded. I have always been true to you and never in thought, word or deed have I been unfaithful to you. How could you impute anything bad to me? What false accusations publicly made and what harsh words uttered against me in the presence of all these people! Could any honest and self-respecting wife suffer a greater shame than this? Can a greater calamity betake her? How can I survive it? Suspected and deserted by my husband and despised by all the world, death would be welcome to me. I wish I had died before I had heard these words. (*Turning to Lakshmana.*) Lakshmana, you have always been eager to serve me and met my needs even before I could express them. Please render me now one last act of service. Prepare a pyre of fire on this spot so that I may fall into it and die. What course is else open to

an honourable woman publicly condemned by an unloving husband, suspicious of her virtue? (*Lakshmana looks at his brother who with a sign of his head and brow gives his assent to it. Then he collects some dry sticks and faggots and sets fire to them. When they are fully ablaze, Sita first goes round Rama reverently with her palms joined and then similarly goes round the fire. Then standing before the fire*)

SITA: "If it is true, that my mind has been constantly fixed on Rama and never swerved this side or that, let the God of Fire protect me. If I have remained pure and not acted as Rama thinks, you, Fire God, that are a witness to all that passes in this world, save me from harm. If it is a fact that I am not the bad woman that Rama suspects me to be and if as the Sun, the Moon, the Wind, and the Dawn and the Evening perfectly know I have at all times remained faithful to Rama and I am a wife every way fit for him, O Fire God, see that I suffer not. I consign myself to thee. (*Saying it she falls into the fire. A general murmur of awe and consternation goes up from the crowd. Immediately steps out of the fire a resplendent figure, the God of Fire carrying in his arms Sita radiant with fresh glory and smiling and walks straight to Rama.*)

AGNI: Rama, this is your wife. She is unblemished and entirely pure. She has neither in thought, by word or by conduct done anything that could bring you dishonour. Ravana, in his pride, thinking that he could win her, carried her away to his place from your Ashram when you were away and though he subjected her to great

inducements, threats and force and used every other means to allure her to himself she was unmoved by them and never allowed herself to be deflected from the path of rectitude and stood steadfast to you, setting an example for chastity and right conduct to womankind of all ages and all climes. Dispel from your mind all doubts about Sita that may still be lingering in thee and receive her back as your worthy wife. I bid you do so.

RAMA: Oh, God of Fire, I am very much beholden to you for bringing back my dear wife unscorched and unscathed. I had no doubts about her rectitude, but I could not expect the world to be as charitable. I am glad she took the test and her chastity is now established beyond impeachment. (*Receives Sita, both smile happily at each other and Sita stands closely at Rama's side The crowd around is also very happy and they give loud cheers.*)

(*Enter Indra with Devas, several Gandharvas, Pannagas, Rishis and others.*)

INDRV: Rama, we all thank you for ridding us and the world of this great terror Ravana. You have achieved a mighty thing. We can now live honourably and in peace in our own realms. The end of your exile has come. Return with Sita and Lakshmana to Ayodhya where your brother Bharata and Shatrugna and your mothers are awaiting you, and assuming the reins of your kingdom and reigning over it for many many long years, establish a rule during which there will be complete peace, plenty and prosperity, there will be no want, no crime, no sickness, no premature death,

during which no wife would be widowed and no children orphaned and during which every one will be fully happy, fully religious and fully good and let coming generations sing your praise untiringly till the end of time. (*Rama bows. Indra, the Devas, the Rishis etc., go away.*)

(*Vibhishana enters wearing a crown on his head accompanied by Lakshmana. Rama greets him and turning to Sugriva also.*)

RAMA: King Vibhishana and King Sugriva, my good friends, I am highly thankful to you both for the great services you have rendered me together with your followers. (*Turning to Hanuman.*) And Hanuman, your services to me are beyond thanks. Now Sugriva and Vibhishana, return to your capitals with your armies. I am eager to get back to Ayodhya where Bharata would be impatiently awaiting me.

VIBHISHANA: Lord Rama, we are all desirous of accompanying you to Ayodhya and taking part in your coronation, My Pushpaka Vimana can carry us all and swiftly too to where you are so anxious to return. Please take us all.

SUGRIVA: Sire, Vibhishana voices what we all desire.

(*Aside between Sita and Lakshmana.*)

SITA: What harsh cruel words my husband spake about me? Did he really mean them, Lakshmana?

LAKSHMANA: What harsh and cruel words you spake to me, madam, at Janasthana; did you really mean them, mother?

SITA: Oh! I had to say all that in my desperation to make you go to Rama's help, but I greatly repented for it later.

LAKSHMANA: Rama had to say all that that he might prove your chastity to all the world and I do not suppose he will ever have any cause to repent for the great service he has done you thereby.

RAMA: So be it then. We shall all board the Pushpaka and proceed to Ayodhya. (They sit in it and the Pushpaka takes off. Curtain falls).

ACT III

Scene 10.

A tableaux. The throne room in the palace at Ayodhya. On the throne is seated Rama with Sita by his side both wearing crowns. Rama's brothers, Sugriva, Vibhishana, Angada and Jambhuvan have, distributed themselves on either side of the crowned couple and Hanuman is kneeling at Rama's feet. The court room is crowded with vanaras and Ayodhya's people. Brahmans are offering blessings to Rama and Sita. Ramdhun is sung by all and at the close of it the curtain drops.

THE END

ERRATA

Page	Line	For	Read
15	10	differentiy	differently
	29	canfidence	confidence
	„	wlfe	wife
17	24	constaut	constant
	„	They	The
22	5	nolhing	nothing
41	4	inferir	inferior
45	28	held	help
56	21	<i>hes</i>	<i>her</i>
60	18	Bnt	But
63	25	park	part
71	20	Pleace	Please
75	4	along	alone
	14	boilinga	boiling
	16	willes	wiles
77	8	fearce	fears
	24	fulfilied	fulfilled
78	15	badiy	badly
81	25	hinding	hiding
83	25	hereocs	heroes
86	1	an	as
89	14	<i>auge</i>	<i>huge</i>

Page	Line	For	Read
94	15	but	hut
104	4	assumod	assumed
	26	reela long	reel along
106	29	please	please let
109	8	huve	have
121	20	ware	were
124	2	then	than
130	22	nen	men
134	22	Rama	Ruma
152	7	promenad	promenade
167	15	drowing	drowning
